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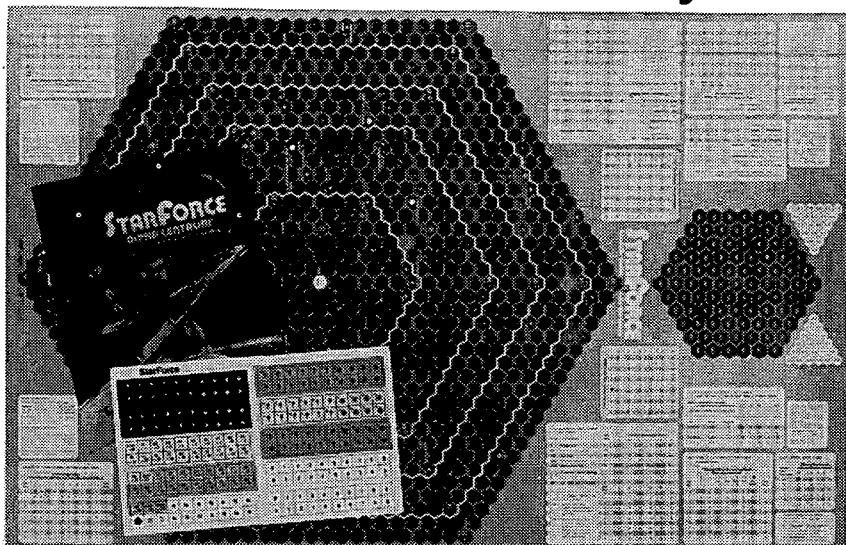
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DECEMBER, 1976

Vol. 50, No. 3

51st Year of Publication

PHILIP JOSE FARMER'S outstanding
 NEW NOVELET, FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE 6

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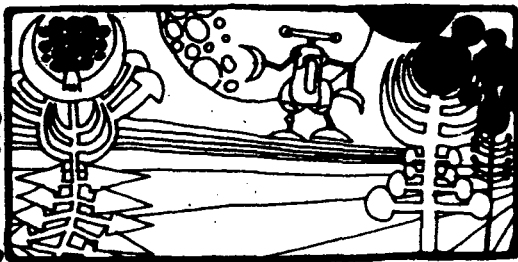
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TED
WHITE

EDITORIAL



THE SONS OF HEINLEIN: It has been fashionable in some science fiction circles for more than ten years now to disparage Robert A. Heinlein. European stf critics, like Franz Rotensteiner, have dismissed Heinlein with almost rabid contempt. One of the party lines of the so-called New Wave movement of the late sixties was the belittlement of Heinlein, both in terms of his impact upon the field and his worth as an author.

However, in that same period Heinlein has solidified his position as an author of best-seller stf—his *Time Enough for Love* achieved major sales in hardcover—and retained much of his popularity within the field, becoming once again Guest of Honor at the 1976 World Science Fiction Convention (he is the only author three times honored in this fashion).

It's not hard to find the reasons for this disparity between the contempt in which he is held in some circles and the honor bestowed upon him in others. Heinlein represents a point of view which has fallen in critical favor but remains popular with the greater audience. Heinlein's greatest skill as an author has always lain in his ability to spin out an engrossing story, from scene to scene, with humanly believable dialogue and fresh ideas. His growing liability as an author lies in his increasing age, which appears to manifest itself in self-indulgence; and his materialistic, engineer-rational viewpoint which has been coupled with a concern for individual rights and responsibilities, which too often

comes out sounding suspiciously right-wing, politically. (Thus leading such Europeans as Rotensteiner and Lem to brand him a Fascist; a case of pots trying to label the kettle black. . .)

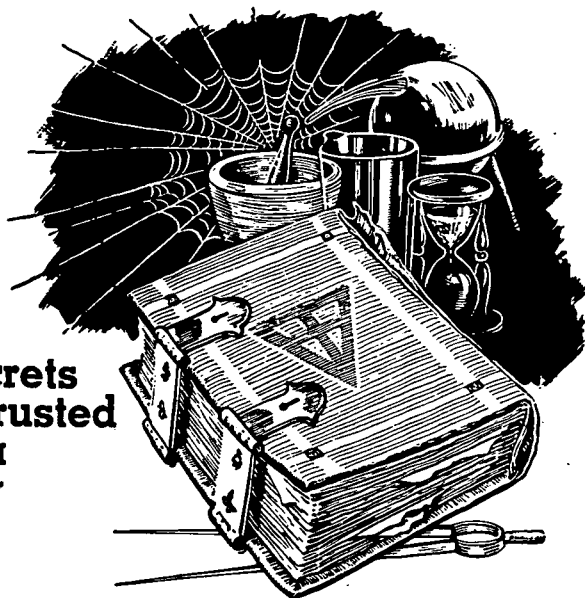
I don't want to use this space to either defend or excoriate Heinlein. Instead, I want to discuss some aspects of his legacy—the “second generation” of stf authors who have drawn inspiration (at the least) from him.

I regard myself as a minor (or perhaps “bastard.”) offspring of Heinlein, myself. I doubt this is apparent in most of my stories, but Heinlein was the author who hooked *me* (at age nine) on stf (with his first juvenile stf novel, *Rocketship Galileo*), and I turned to him for inspiration when I wrote my own juvenile stf novels, all three of which reflect his influence, and the first one of which I modelled directly upon what I considered the best aspects of his juveniles.

When Alexei Panshin appeared on the scene in the early sixties, his debt to Heinlein was immediately obvious. (As an Assistant Editor at the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, I read Alexei's first submission with surprised delight and immediately passed it up the editorial chain with cries of “Here's the new Heinlein!” My superiors were less impressed with the notion of a new Heinlein—they had the original—and didn't buy the story but it ended up as part of the Nebula Award-winning *Rite of Passage*, vindicating my judg-

(cont. on page 123)

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SAN JOSE

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Philip Jose Farmer's last appearance here was with "The Oogenesis of Bird City" (September, 1970). Now, after too long an absence, he returns with a new science fiction story—a rarity these days—in which the protagonist, a Supreme Court Justice, must deal with a—

FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE

PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER

"STUCK . . ."

"What did you say?"

Eldred A. Goll held up his hand for silence.

Christine closed her mouth.

" . . . will be delayed for an hour.

Departure time is now 3:35. Passengers on Flight 395 will please report at Gate 23 . . ."

"Oh, no! Not another hour!"

His wife looked at her wristwatch, though the big lobby clock was on the pillar directly before them.

"It's St. Louis time," he said. "Why don't you set your watch back two hours."

"I'm running on my time, not theirs."

"Would that were true."

He paced back and forth. The men, women, and children on the benches looked at him incuriously. He stroked his short, white, and bushy beard, grown during the month and a half in Hawaii and the Fiji islands. Christine had complained, though teasingly, that it scratched her face. She rather liked it now.

"You look like a United States Supreme Justice should look like," she had said. "Distinguished, full of years and wisdom. Not to mention something else," she added.

She was referring to what she delicately called his "affliction."

Nobody recognized him, though there had been much news media publicity about his marriage. Christine was a young woman. Only, *only*, forty! She had been a babe in arms when he was thirty-one. She had just entered kindergarten when his first wife had died.

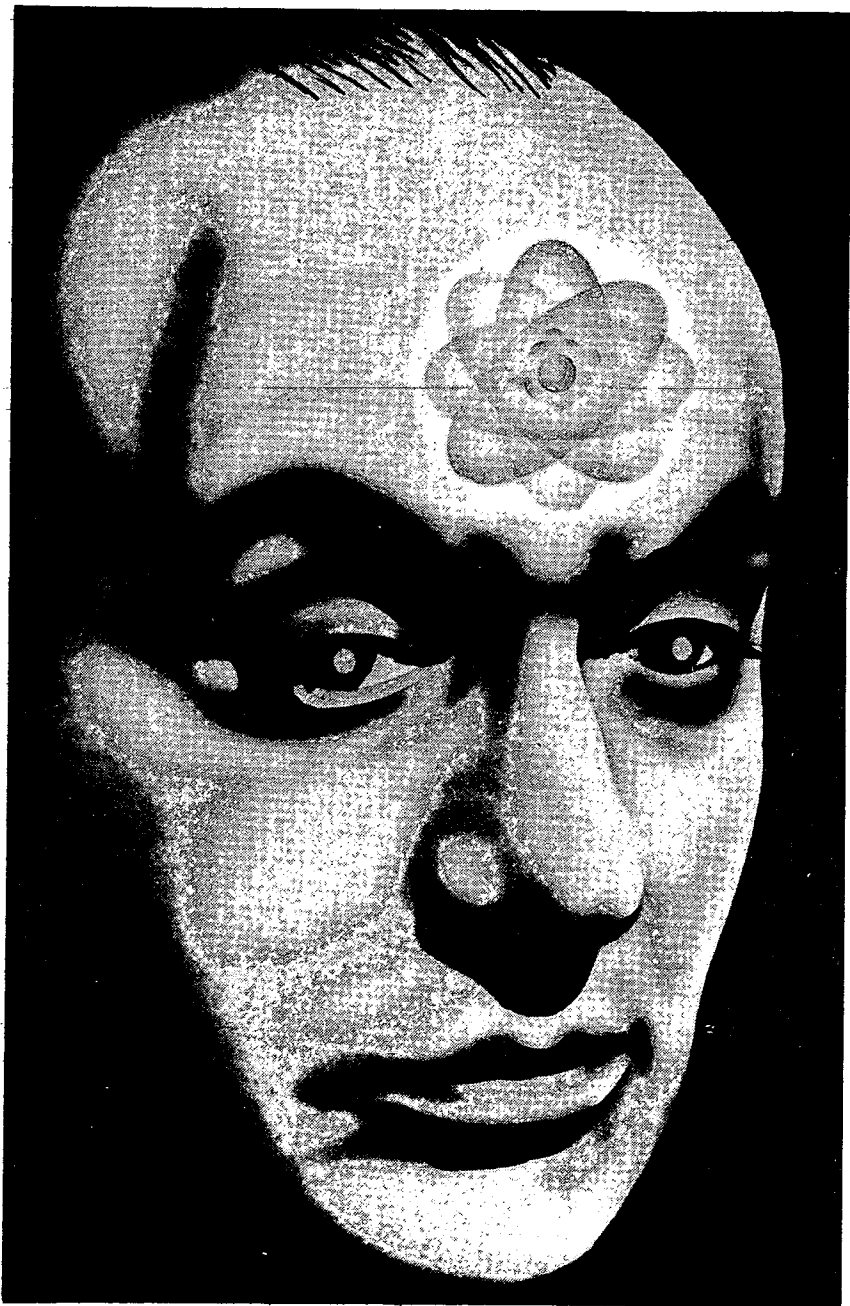
"Cradle-robber," she had called him during their honeymoon. She liked to tease, and he liked her for doing it. It had made him feel younger. But now he felt his age. He was seized, in more than one sense, by the decision he must make. *The Decision*, as he pictured it in his mind. It was bright white, like the title of a movie. *The Decision*. Starring E. A. Goll and eight wise old men in black. With a cast of four hundred million.

No, a cast of five billion. This case was not the concern of one nation. Truly, the world was a global village. Spit to windward, and every person on Earth felt moisture.

But, and however—and there were always throngs of buts, ifs, howevers mixed with the whereases—he should not be considering the global reverberations. It was his duty—and he saw it clearly, didn't he?—to focus on one matter. The Constitution as it applied to the case.

Why, then, was he going to

Illustrated by Richard Olsen



Watahee, New York, to see the situation for himself. What business did he have there? He had studied the documents, the statistics, the briefs, everything that was expected, more than was expected.

He had all he had to know in his mind.

But it—the all—was stuck in his mind. It wouldn't budge. Probably this was because the all was not really the all. There was more. There was always more.

There were the human beings in Watahee who could be grievously affected by his decision. And there were the other people throughout the United States who would be affected just as profoundly. What moved in one place moved everything in other places. Throughout the world. No one smiled with the lips alone or cried with the eyes alone. The entire face, like a flag in the wind, rippled. The throat closed or opened. The heart slowed or raced. The glands were blocked or poured out stimuli or inhibitors. The whole body responded negatively or positively. Or some parts responded negatively; other parts, positively.

Sometimes, the reaction, though moving millions of substances invisibly within the body, froze the outer body. Stasis.

Christine said, "You look haggard, and your face is flushed. Come here. I want to feel your forehead."

He bent over. Her palm felt cool. He straightened up as she said, "You do feel *warm*. But you're not *burning* up. I think you have a low-grade fever."

"Proof I'm still alive," he said. "Not that I need it. Listen." He looked around. Nobody seemed to be listening. "I think I'm going to get some action."

"I hope so," she said. "But you've taken so much medicine you should be ready to explode. I think it's all those pills that are making you sick. If you'd just taken my advice . . ."

"Where would you get prune juice on Tonga-Tonga?" he said, trying to smile.

She seemed to be receding, to be dwindling.

She was no Alice who had taken a pill, however. On the contrary. *He* had swallowed the pill(s).

"Really, why won't you see a doctor?"

"Because I'm only temporarily indisposed. Because I'm due in Washington in five days. You know that. Because I want to go to Wahatee first, and I won't be able to if I spend several days in bed."

He added, "I'll be gone a minute, darling. I want to pick up a newspaper."

He returned with the bulky Sunday edition of the *Post-Dispatch* under his arm. He settled down by Christine, saying, "Do you want any particular section?"

"Which one is the crossword puzzle in?"

This was the question-and-answer response, ritualized, repeated every morning at home. He didn't know why. Perhaps it was to keep the lines of communication open. When they were in Alexandria, she knew where the puzzle was. Its location never varied. Yet, he went through the business of looking at the index on the front page, noting that it was in Section C on page 3.

Sometimes, he thought her passion for crossword puzzles was similar to that of a knight seeking the Holy Grail. No, that was a not quite correct metaphor. She was looking for The Word. Somewhere, in one of the

thousands of puzzles, she would find The Word. And all would become brightly illuminated. Then, she would know the meaning of life, its goal.

Or she would know its absurdity and its meaninglessness.

The danger in such quests was that it might be successful. The Grail could turn out to be only a rusty old chamberpot.

As for himself, he had quit looking for The Word since he was eighteen. No, not true. He must amend that. He had *found* The Word in The Law. The Law was The Word. In the beginning was chaos and peril. But The Law—The Word—had imposed order and safety.

HE SIGHED as he unfolded the comics section. Here were more Words. *Peanuts* and *The Wizard of Id* showed forth more wisdom than a hundred books of philosophy. Here, compressed in a small space, ready to uncoil to light-years' length, was real Wisdom. Laughter, sad or uproarious, at our human plight, at the state of the cosmos.

It was also therapy for him. Having chuckled at the illogical logic or logical illogicality of Charlie Brown and Gang and the egoistic inhabitants of the Kingdom of Id, he felt better. He was renewed. It was a hundred times better to read the comics for preparation for a stiff day in court than to scan the briefs.

Despite his fever and his painfully swollen abdomen, he smiled at this Sunday's theater of the absurd.

But page 2 of the A section hit him as if it were a club. It was three half-columns headed: **LANDMARK DECISION STOPS FUSION-POWER DISPOSAL-PLANT CONSTRUCTION.**

Though he knew all the details of the story, he read the article.

"An upper New York utility is appealing to the U.S. Supreme Court a landmark ruling which has stopped construction of a combined fusion-power-sewage-trash disposal plant near Wahatee, N.Y.

"Officials of Gotham Interior Power stated yesterday, 'The 2-1 decision of the Court of Appeals for the 2nd Circuit seems to have substituted its judgement for that of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in a highly technical area.'

"Meanwhile, citizens' groups and environmentalists saluted the court's decision in Schenectady to halt construction of the Wahatee complex.

"The court ruled Wednesday that the NRC violated its own guidelines by allowing the utility to build the \$900,000,000, two thousand-megawatt plant near the Wahatee National Park and a city of more than 25,000 persons. The court called for an immediate halt to the complex's construction:

" 'The decision was a great victory for the public,' said James Mansard, attorney for the People's Interest Legal Limb, one of the groups seeking to close down the complex."

There was much more, though not a hundredth of what was actually involved.

Theoretically, the Wahatee project promised great things. It would end the electrical power shortage that had browned-out and blacked-out so much of the nation in the past decade. Also, it would help to solve the ever-increasing problem of sewage and trash disposal.

The Laser-Ignited Fusion Energy (LIFE) system was new but had been thoroughly tested for three years in a pilot project. The experts had declared it safe.

Basically, and simply, it operated

thus. A high-power laser beam ignited frozen pellets of deuterium-tritium (heavy hydrogen isotopes). At temperatures between 85 and 100 million Kelvin (hotter than the sun), the isotopes became a plasma or ionized gas.

The energy of the resultant fusion explosions was confined in a tritium-bleeding lithium "blanket" and channeled to generate electric power by means of conventional steam cycles.

One of the reactors would be used for destruction. It would receive a steady flow of sewage, plastic trash, acids and even nerve gases that would otherwise have to be dumped into the ocean or stored underground. They would be as destroyed as if they had been orbited into the sun.

These materials would be piped or transported through a gigantic pipe-truck-railroad system built by a private-enterprise combine with government aid. This system would give jobs to hundreds of thousands, boom the economy, and revitalize the dying railroads.

It all sounded extremely practical and absolutely necessary.

Yet, many people objected to it, and they have voiced their objections where they had the most effect—in the courts.

He grimaced, and stood up slowly. "If you'll pardon me, dear. I must venture to that bourne into which no woman is permitted."

She smiled slightly, seeming to move closer, to become larger. He wondered if he was swaying. He certainly felt light-headed.

"As long as you keep up that bridegroom's banter, you can't be deathly ill," she said. "But if you take too long, I'll send in someone after you."

"Don't tell him who I am."

He headed for the door marked MEN.

THE RACKET was not deafening, but in his condition he found it upsetting.

He pushed in on the door and entered. He faced a blank wall, set there to keep passersby from seeing the occupants while the door was open, though they wouldn't have seen anything except men at a line of washbowls. The second entrance was on the left. He went through that, stepping slightly to one side to avoid bumping into a man who seemed to be in a hurry to get out.

The racket was coming from around the corner to the right. He stepped in and paused, catching, for a moment, a view of himself in the long mirror over the washbowls. He certainly looked tall and distinguished, resembling the great Justice Hughes.

A fine white powder flew through the air, swirling around him, settling down on his suit. He made a noise of disgust and brushed the white stuff from his lapels. What was going on?

Four men, wearing white overalls and yellow hardhats, were watching one man hacking away at the wall. On the back of the laborer in big orange letters was *Acme Destruct-Construct Co.*

A bomb!

A terrorist had hidden a bomb inside the men's room and then phoned the airport authorities!

Good sense reasserted itself immediately. If there was a bomb scare, the airport would be in an uproar of evacuation. And any wall-destruction would be done by airport and police personnel.

Nevertheless, his heart was beating hard. He felt even dizzy. He grabbed the edge of a bowl, feeling its

wetness, and steadied himself. The worker stopped swinging his pickaxe, and for a minute there was a comparative silence. The worker turned to join his fellows in staring at him.

One of them, a short squat unshaven fellow with a huge jaw, said, "You okay, Pops?"

What would the man say if told that "Pops" was a U.S. Supreme Court Judge?

Probably he would say nothing. He'd just laugh.

"Why not? He was a "skilled" worker making an annual wage that equalled, if it did not exceed, the salary of the world-famous jurist. If he and the hardhat compared fringe benefits, he would be scratched at the starting post.

So much for the ever-growing egalitarian philosophy: I'm just as good as you. Or, to put it more realistically, I'm just as mediocre as you. Americans had extended the original premise that all were equal in the eyes of the law. They now insisted that all were equal in *every* respect. Which meant ignoring the obvious, which was that people were not born equal in intelligence, drive, temperament, or physical constitution.

But Uncle Sam would cancel Mother Nature's inequities through legislation. That was the American Dream.

He became aware that all five were staring at him. Not one had stepped forward, however. They were only mildly concerned, perhaps not even that. Nor were they going to get involved.

Yes. He was right. They had shuffled back up against the wall. They were removing themselves as far as possible from a contamination that they could not define but felt deeply. The feeling sprang from the Old

Stone Age man, the savage that lived in every human being, that 6000 years of civilization could not kill.

If he had been one of their own, he'd be treated differently. If his hair wasn't so neatly cut, so chort, his beard so well-trimmed, his clothes so expensive, he'd be immersed in their concern.

So much for the denial of the existence of class differences.

This was the Great American Schizophrenia.

Then the one who had spoken walked toward him, close enough so that Goll could see the broken veins in the eyes and smell the tobacco and cheap booze on his breath.

The face was harshly angled and tough, that of a professional wrestler who had made fame and fortune as the "villain," the "ugly," in the ring.

But the eyes were soft and so was the voice.

"You feeling sick, Pops?"

No, just slightly ashamed, Goll thought. I'm wrong again. The savage was there, alright. But savages could be sympathetic, empathetic, sometimes more so than their urban relatives. And this man was a human being, which meant that he was both savage and civilized. Sometimes, one "being" got the upper hand over the other; sometimes both expressed themselves at the same time. Or in bewildering irrational alternation.

"I'll be all right," he said. "Thanks. It's just a slight indisposition."

The softness died in the man's eyes. That "slight indisposition" marked him as one of the Others. There were visual and verbal clues to "class," and now the old man had flashed both.

The hardhat stepped back. Goll said, "I'll be okay." But it was too late. Nothing he could say or do now

would reinstate that sudden concern. The two feet of physical separation might as well be a lightyear.

The hardhat turned away, his broad back as expressive of indifference as his face. One of the men picked up a crowbar and began banging away at the wallboard with no great show of strength or enthusiasm. The others watched, ready to check him if he worked too swiftly. The tempo had been determined by many factors, one of which was making the job last as long as possible.

It was irrational for them to do so. Slow work meant fewer profits for their employer. The citizen who wanted to buy a new home couldn't afford it because of the towering cost of materials and labor. The decrease in homes bought and office building erected resulted in unemployment for the construction workers.

Surely, they could see that.

No, they couldn't.

"I'll get mine, Jack."

It was stupid and selfish.

"But then—they'd had good teachers. The owners of industries, their employers, had shown them the way.

And why was he considering such things? They had nothing to do with the Decision, the law as limned in the light of the Constitution. He *was* sick.

AT THAT MOMENT, the door swung open. A group of men—what else?—burst in, talking loudly, laughing. They were young, exuberant, and very tall. A couple were human skyscrapers.

Obviously, they were basketball players on their way to or coming from a game. If it was the latter, they'd won. He'd seen too many teams in airports on their way home, anything but conquering heroes. They

were always glum, silent, brooding, self-reproachful. *If only I hadn't missed that free throw . . .*

The youngsters lined up. The two tallest—the black must be at least six-foot-nine—were side by side. They looked down, cracking jokes that surely must have originated in the Old Stone Age. The white laughed loudly and said, "Hey, everybody! Get this! Another myth destroyed!"

The black laughed, showing huge white teeth, and slapped the white on the back with his free hand.

"Don't jive me, man! You know I was out in the cold longer than you. Wait'll it warms up. Then you'll see Saskatoon, Saskatchewan!"

"Where'd you get them googly blue eyes!" a black at the end of the line shouted.

Though he felt even a little warmer and dizzier, though the cramps were hurting some, Goll smiled. An Arab who had just emerged from a stall and was now washing his hands—with particular care to the left—was eavesdropping. He looked puzzled. He might be very fluent in American English, but the punchline references would be obscure. He wasn't native-born and so was unacquainted with the "dirty" jokes endemic among the male population—not to mention the female.

As he walked slowly past them, he considered the change in times, in attitudes. It had only been a little over two decades, yet it seemed far in the past. WHITE ONLY. COLORED. They did not mean what they said. If you were a Nigerian potentate or diplomat, blacker than most American blacks, dressed in flowing robes, you could enter the WHITE ONLY. The sign should have said: WHITE AND NON-AMERICAN COLORED ONLY.

The tabu markers had gone down,

not without terror and bloodshed. First, at the airports and railroads and bus depots. Uncle Sam had jurisdiction over interstate commerce. "Federal interference" many called it. But even Eisenhower, not by any means known as a nigger-lover, "seed his duty and done it." As President of the United States, he had to execute, to enforce, the National Law. And so, Little Rock. And so, thousands of little and big Little Rocks.

The Law was above prejudice and persecution. Or it was supposed to be. No rich murderer, however, had gone to the death cell. Money talks. The logical thing to do was to make sure that money did not talk, that wealthy murderers were executed. But that seemed impossible. So, the illogical triumphed. Nobody, rich or poor, was to be hung or gassed.

Well, "nobody" wasn't quite right. A person who killed a president or a federal policeman while he was on duty could be executed. But that would change. Wasn't John Doe, as valuable in the eyes of God, and of democracy, as the head of the nation?

The Constitution. That greatest organ of state fashioned by men. An organ organic. Fixed in form but adaptive in function. A capacity for growth inherent in its structure. In 1896 the nine old men in black had ruled (*Plessy v. Ferguson*) that "separate but equal" facilities satisfied the requirements of the 14th amendment (1868).

That was that. Or so it seemed.

But one generation dies, and the next doesn't see things through the same prism. The light shifts in intensity and color when the refractive instrument is turned. The light is the same as before, but now it's seen differently.

And so, the nine old men in

black—no longer the same old men though the color of the robes was unchanged—corrected the errors of their predecessors. They ruled (*Brown v. Board of Education*) that states that segregated white and Negro children in the public schools had violated the Constitution.

In a few months he and his eight colleagues would be sitting upon another case. *The Prophet v. State of California*. The First Amendment provided that Congress would make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. This had not been construed to protect immoral acts practiced within a religion. Thus, polygamy was licentious and so illegal. But the cult of *The Temple of the True God* claimed that polygamy was a vital part of their religion. When its founder, *The Prophet* (this was his legal name), was arrested, he had hired the best lawyers in California. Everybody had supposed that the case would be thrown out of the state supreme court, but it had been passed on up. Goll had hoped that the Appellate Court would stop it. No, the buck was passed again, though the U.S. Supreme Court could refuse to accept the appeal. Goll himself, however much he dreaded its consideration, felt that he should do so. And, surprisingly, so did his colleagues. Though they may have had different motives than he.

Twenty years ago the case would have been decided at the lower level, and *The Prophet* would be in jail by now. But the Zeitgeist, the spirit of the times, had changed swiftly. There were so many people living without benefit of clergy, so much group sex going on. *At least, they'll be married* was the most common opinion in a recent national survey.

The opinion of the majority of citizens must not be an influence. The only issues was the correct interpretation of the Constitution.

And so now what had once been a dead issue, buried for all time, had crawled out of the grave.

The banging on the wall became more noisy; the voices of the young men died. The cramps, gurglings, the rumblings within increased. He was in a near-panic. After all this time, a sudden urgency. No doubt it had been brought about more by psychology than physiology. When the way was open, it was closed. Check and balance. Now that the way was closed, it was open. Check and balance.

The door to a free stall swung out. Reprieve. He hesitated. It was difficult to find a clean public restroom almost anywhere. Americans were supposed to be the most sanitation-conscious people on Earth. They were not, as anyone who had visited Japan knew. If one judged by the state of its public restrooms, he would conclude that the United States was inhabited by swine. This indictment would include the restrooms of many of the posh restaurants. How many times had he gone into a stall and recoiled with repulsion? The recent occupant of this cubicle had charged out as if ashamed of his behavior or as if an emergency demanded he break all laws of common decency to get to it. He didn't even have time to press on the flush valve. And the seat and the floor would look as if a chimpanzee had lived in the enclosure. The recent occupant would disdain to wash his hands. He would go swiftly to his emergency, spreading disease or its potentialities wherever he went. On dollar bills, coins, gum and cigarette machine pushbuttons, doorknobs,

while shaking hands, and so on and so on.

There had been over two hundred years of public education in this country, with special stress of the findings of Pasteur. Yet at least half the citizens acted as if unaware of the linkage between germs and disease.

The culprits were not confined to the "poor." Not by any means. Goll knew a number of senators and big business executives who omitted washing their hands after excreting—unless someone they knew was observing them. Not always then. They acted as if they, personally, could not be dirty. Others, yes. But not they. Bacteria died on contact with them. They sweat a sort of holy water which rendered them always pure. Immaculate deception.

As for the great "unwashed," the ghetto dwellers, the rednecks, the lower middle class, they just didn't care. They'd lived with dirt from birth; it was their natural environment. Try and get a landlord to repair the broken plumbing or to gas the cockroaches. Just try.

On the other hand, the landlord maintained that to fix the plumbing and exterminate the vermin was a waste of money. In a short time, the tenants would have filled the pipes with rags—too poor to buy toilet paper or they'd rather spend their money on lottery tickets or beer—and the filth would quickly accumulate and bring the cockroaches and rats in.

This was true. But it was a vicious circle, and no one knew the point at which the circle had first been drawn. And no one knew how to break it. Or really cared.

Goll hesitated. He dreaded to enter the filthy chamber, but he felt moved to do so. While he stood there, he lost his chance. A hand reached past

him, banged palm up against the door, and banged it hard against the inner wall. If anyone had been sitting there, leaning forward contemplatively, he would have suffered an injury on the head.

GOLL WAS STARTLED. The tall, thin, distinguished gray-haired man was U.S. Senator Thomas Roffe. Evidently he was in such a hurry that he hadn't looked at his long acquaintance, Chief Justice E. A. Goll. No, that wasn't it. The beard was a successful disguise.

He was out of luck for sure. And, knowing this, he felt a surge of distress.

The silvery tip of Roffe's head was visible above the top of the door. It was motionless for a moment. Was he also contemplating with repulsion the spoor of a citizen, perhaps one of his own constituents? Was he about to charge out with the same reckless inconsideration? Would he look around desperately, then perhaps recognize Goll?

No. The top of the head moved back, and a hand holding a tilted flat bottle rose into view. Its amber liquid content diminished rapidly.

The senator's need was not what Goll had first thought. It was no secret in Washington that Roffe was an alcoholic. Nor was it a matter of particular comment or concern. He was just one of the crowd, since there were more problem drinkers in Congress, proportionately, then in any other profession. Or, for that matter, any sector of society.

"The hand that tilts the bottle turns the wheel of state."

Roffe was thirsty, but Roffe was not going to be caught drinking in the cocktail bar upstairs. He had a public image to preserve. He also had a private image. Ten to one, Goll thought,

Roffe's wife was standing in the corridor, waiting for her husband. A member of the W.C.T.U., she kept a close eye on her husband. But, like all drunkards, he knew a hundred places of concealment and refuge.

The door near him swung open, and a man walked out. At least the fellow had had the decency to flush. Goll put a quarter in the slot and entered. After some laying on of paper protection—throwaway armor, he thought—he settled down. His groan was half-pain, half-anticipatory relief, like a hen hopping to lay an outside egg. Here he was within his nest, though the world clamored and howled outside. The banging and shouting of the workers at the wall, the chatter and laughter of a new influx of invaders just off a plane, all these beat around him.

But he had great powers of concentration. At least, in his normal state he did. Now, the slight fever, the dizziness, the sense that time and distance were somehow stretched out—like taffy made from a gummy poison—and the fist closing and opening within him, these distracted him.

He closed his eyes, and as if it were on a screen saw:

PREAMBLE

WE THE PEOPLE of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union . . .

" . . . more perfect Union . . ."

Either a thing was perfect or it was imperfect. It couldn't be "more perfect."

How could the founding fathers, masters of the English language, have started off with the wrong, the ungrammatical, foot?

Easily explained. The late eighteenth century had not as yet fallen prey to the pedants. Samuel Johnson and Dryden had not man-

aged to convince the schoolteachers and the university academics that there was a "right" and a "wrong" English. It was perfectly acceptable in 1787 to write "more perfect." Just as it was acceptable for Shakespeare to declare that this was "the most unkindest cut of all." It was the spirit, not the grammar, that counted.

It was a wonder that the academics hadn't tried to rewrite the Preamble and Shakespeare. They must have thought of it but hadn't dared temper with near-sacred works.

Somebody spoke just outside his door, and he brought himself back to his subject with a jerk. Had he almost fallen asleep? Or had the feverishness sneaked up on him?

He looked through the thin crack between door and wall. He wasn't mistaken. That *was* the voice of Omness. Omness, the founder and executive president of W. H. Omness Realty Enterprises. And that was a slice of his profile, thin, but enough to identify him for sure. Goll had seen him twice on the national news. First, when Omness was under investigation because of a suit brought against him by a home-owners' group. The charge: one of Omness' companies, Famous Realty & Investment Gains, had built a vast tract development on Wahatee with shoddy materials and without due consideration for the mud slides resulting from spring rains. Also, his company had failed to report correctly the dividends due the home-owners. They were supposed to reap a share of the profits, a gimmick that had seduced the buyers by the thousands. But the setup was so complicated that no one, not even the federal auditors, could make sense of it.

Second, Omness was suspected of violating the antitrust act. Investiga-

tion had disclosed, so far, that he controlled over half of the realty, savings and loan companies, and construction industries in New England, New York, and New Jersey. All through dummy corporations, of course.

It was a mess, Goll thought. But then, wasn't it always?

And what was Omness doing here?

The answer wasn't as obvious as it seemed.

For one thing, a large attaché case was leaning against the wall by his legs.

Goll couldn't see the other person, but Omness wouldn't be talking to himself.

Goll leaned forward, turned the locking knob, and pushed the door slightly ajar.

Omness was walking away, giving Goll a full view of that cherubic profile. A chubby jolly man, that Omness, inspiring confidence and liking.

And there was Senator T. Roffe, standing by the case, not looking at it, swaying slightly, blinking.

Omness disappeared around the corner into the crowd and the clamor and banging.

Goll closed the door and turned the knob. Roffe had turned his head toward him. If he thought someone was observing him, he would automatically suspect a government agent was shadowing him.

Befuddled as he was, he would know enough to walk out without touching that case. That is, he would if it contained what Goll thought it did. He could be wrong. Omness might have forgotten it; it might contain only underwear and toilet equipment.

It might not even be Omness' property.

HE LOOKED THROUGH the crack

again. Roffe had moved closer to the case. The front part of his flushed, bug-eyed profile was visible. It revolved, and he was facing in the opposite direction. He reached into his coat and, yes, of course, he was bringing the flask out again. And the rest of the bourbon was going down. He was nerving himself to the next step, uncaring if anybody saw him boozing.

Goll's view was cut off for a moment. A short squat dark man, clad in an Army jacket with faded corporal's stripes, a red-and-white checked shirt, dirty green levis, and dirty tennis shoes, had passed by. The relatively light skin and straight black hair and the hawkish profile were those of an East Coast Indian. Probably he was an Iroquois. What was he doing in St. Louis? High steel work, perhaps. If he was working, that is. The construction industry was in a slump.

Goll continued staring through the crack. Roffe was gone. Was he mistaken? The furtive transaction might be all in his mind, the case belonged to some forgetful harrassed travel. Or—? It contained a bomb . . . ?

No. Surely not. A terrorist would leave his explosives where it would be difficult to locate. That is, he/she would if he/she were anywhere near rational.

Goll was seized with cramps. Terror and panic were moving him in no mysterious way, doing what mere anxiety could not do. At any other time, it would have been more than welcome. But it was keeping him from fleeing at once. He could not leave, though survival demanded it. The loss of dignity, the humiliation, the disgrace, were hands holding him down.

But if that did indeed hold a bomb . . .

He relaxed, and the gurgling and

cramps died. He even managed to smile slightly. He had allowed his fevered imagination to run away with him. There was no evidence that the case held a bomb. Not the slightest. And yet he, who ordered his mind, his life, around evidence, had abandoned in one moment of fear all his principles. Coolness, calmness, meticulously careful calculation, had fallen away from him.

He looked through the crack again. Roffe was back, standing by the case, looking around rather stupidly. Was that supposed to be an expression of innocence?

Suddenly, a brown hand swooped into his field of vision. It closed on the handle of the case. The case lifted. The Indian flashed by, leaving Roffe startled, frozen, and helpless.

Roffe's eyes were bugging even more. He opened his mouth as if to call out. For a moment, his protruding eyes and gaping jaws made him look like one of Goll's pet goldfish. Where a fish sucked in water, Roffe was sucking in agony.

Would he dare raise a cry after the thief?

No, he wouldn't. He wasn't that drunk. He had to stand there, undoubtedly dying within from frustration and rage. There went—how much? How big a bribe would Omness pay Roffe? Fifty thousand dollars? No, that would have been a fairly large payoff for a project of the magnitude of the Wahatee plant a few years ago. But inflation has raised everything, including bribes. It might have held a hundred thousand, perhaps two to three hundred thousand dollars.

What would the thief think, how react, when he opened the case? He'd be expecting to find some shaving equipment, some clothes he could sell

for a few dollars. Would he be frightened away by the largeness of the amount, think he'd intercepted a courier case in a Mafia dropoff? Would he grab a few hundred dollars and abandon the rest in a garbage can? Or would he drop dead from a heart attack?

That was his worry. Goll himself had enough to consider in his case. He had witnessed two crimes, and yet he could do nothing about it. He must keep silent. He, a Supreme Court Justice, could not tell anyone about it.

It wasn't just that it would be degrading and humiliating to reveal the circumstances. The news media would make a big joke of that; the public would have a fine time laughing at him. He could imagine the remarks, the dirty stories arising from the incident.

No. It wasn't that. Regardless of what kind of figure he would make, he would give his testimony. He would not draw back. That is, if he had any evidence to give. But he did not.

There was not the slightest proof that Omness had owned the case. The senator had made no move to pick it up. Undoubtedly, he had intended to do so. Otherwise, why would he have looked so stricken when the Indian snatched it?

A moment later, he heard a thump and looking out saw the senator lying on the floor, face up. Men quickly crowded around him. Goll stayed where he was. He couldn't help Roffe. If he came out, he might be recognized, and too many would wonder why a supreme court justice and a very influential senator happened to be in the same men's room, especially if the case did contain money and did come to the au-

thorities' attention. There was nothing to be proved, but people would wonder if there was some sort of collusion between them. No one would believe that it was just a coincidence. Omness could deny having been in the men's room.

The attendants came and hauled the unconscious Roffe off on a stretcher. From the remarks of one, Roffe's heart was still beating. It was likely, Goll thought, that the senator had suffered a stroke. Whether it was caused by Roffe's age and excessive drinking or reaction to the theft—or both—no one would ever know.

Goll's mind and legs felt numb. He'd been too long in a mental and physical status.

He stood up and, leaning against the door with one hand, moved his legs. Pain shot through his legs as the blood stirred. The sounds of destruction, halted during the uproar over Roffe, broke out again. He did some shallow kneebends and then resumed his position, the archaic attitude.

Why didn't he give up, quit trying?

No, he wasn't one to quit. Besides, there were indications that if he stuck to the task . . .

TWO MEN, youths by their voices, were standing near the door. They were talking loudly, enabling him to hear snatches of what they said through the bang and rip of the destruction.

“ . . . science-fiction book . . . by Leo Queequeg Tincrowdor . . . short stories . . . new . . . for the bicentennial edition . . . yeah, I like him though I don't always understand . . . listen, you gotta read this one . . . what? . . . *Columbia Takes A Constitutional* . . . mean? . . . you know! Constitutional! . . . taking a walk for your health . . . you haven't? . . .

well, anyway, haw! haw! . . . mad scientist . . . yeah, I know . . . cliché . . . but Tincrowdor . . . clichés in a new light . . . so, this scientist runs the Constitution through a computer . . . no, he didn't just drop it into the slot . . . punched the buttons . . .

"Then . . . haw! haw! the data's fed by the computer into a protein machine . . . what? . . . so the Constitution can be made flesh, it's turned into a real living human being . . .

"And the mad scientist calls her Columbia, see? What else? She's beautiful, statuesque . . . no, she doesn't carry a torch . . . living embodiment of the ideal America . . . goes for a walk . . . strolling in Central Park, see, that's where the constitutional comes in . . . look, Tincrowdor always has double, sometimes triple meanings . . .

"So, Columbia walks through Central Park. And she's mugged and raped! Haw, haw!

"Oh, oh, someone's through. See you, Jack."

Goll had laughed at the ending of the story, but as he thought about it, he got angry. It was easy to criticize, to condemn America. Easy because there was so much that needed criticizing and condemning. God knew that; man knew that. America had been violated, raped, by its citizens. In the beginning was a vast land with seemingly inexhaustible riches. Use them up, there's always more. The Garden of Eden has no limits.

At the same time, citizen had violated, raped, citizen. The rich had exploited the poor, using violence, mainly through the police, to enforce the exploitation. Slavery of the black wasn't the only open sore on the fair face of Columbia. The factories and the coal mines of the North were

forms of slavery, as evil as and more insidious than its Southern counterpart.

But there was the Constitution, a device created by our Founding Fathers to establish and enforce justice and opportunity and the pursuit of happiness. (Though happiness was wisely not defined.) Many of the Fathers had been slave-owners, and those that weren't were not averse to exploiting the poor.

But there was the Constitution, the statement of the ideal, written by themselves. They had not dreamed that their creation was the instrument which would free the slaves (though it would put them in a worse form of slavery). Nor that it would then give ex-slaves and the exploited poor and exploited women a chance for freedom.

The Constitution was said to be the most nearly perfect document of state ever conceived. It was said to be self-regulating.

Goll thought that the first statement was true. The second was false. The Constitution was not self-regulating. It did not operate like a positive-feedback self-maintaining, self-powered, self-correcting servo-mechanism-computer.

It had to be operated by people. It was there, ready to be used. But it wouldn't work unless people used it. And there were too many who had ignored and were ignoring it. Or using it (for a time, at least) for their own selfish purposes. But when the persecuted, the exploited, felt that the machine wasn't working properly, then they could make sure that it was. Despite all attempts to block them, they could get to the control panel and could get the proper buttons punched. And then the machine started up, and the regulating, the

correcting, began.

The control panel was, in a sense, the U.S. Supreme Court.

The discrepancy between the ideal (as stated by the Constitution) and the actual (America as it was) was often great. Sometimes, seemingly unbridgeable.

And it took time, oh, so much time, to force the ideal and the actual closer, closer, never quite bringing it together.

Meanwhile, hundred of thousands, millions, suffered and died.

But the old Adam and Eve had always been in humankind and always would be. Americans were not a separate species; there was as much of "original sin" or "Old Nick" in Americans as in any other nationality. But no more than in others.

The Constitution was designed to inhibit the old Adam/Eve and to protect the vulnerable. In one sense, it was a vaccine against evil. One which, however, required frequent booster shots.

Goll groaned then as body and mind strained.

Was the Wahatee case responsible for both blockages? Cause and effect were subtle, especially in a person's body.

The project would combine atomic power and sewage-trash disposal. It would provide electrical power to a large part of central and upper New York. Eventually, it would power half of New York City. And the complex would receive through a gigantic pipe system a vast amount of the metropolis' sewage and via trucks and railroads vast quantities of unbiodegradable trash.

But what if there was an accident? LIFE had been tried out in a pilot project for three years, and it had functioned one hundred percent. But

that was no guarantee that it was malfunction-or accident-proof.

Goll remember a 1974 case. The operators at a Lake Michigan-located nuclear power fission plant were transferring slightly radioactive water from one tank to another. The tank being filled overflowed, spilling the radioactive water onto the ground.

Investigation revealed that the electronic systems that were supposed to flood the reactor with cooling water in such an emergency had not operated properly.

Some electrical wires had been mistakenly connected *in reverse*.

Human error. Human error resulted in human tragedy, sometimes on a large scale.

That same year, more than 1400 "abnormal occurrences," as the NRC termed it, had occurred. Last year, there had been more than 1800 "abnormal occurrences." Only seven of these were, however, "directly significant" to safe reactor operation or radiation release. And no injuries or property damage had occurred.

There had been 929 cases which constituted a violation of federal technical standards.

To ensure a "minimum casualty list," the NRC had decreed that no nuclear plant could be built within two miles of cities with a population of 25,000 or more.

Gotham Interior Power had complied. When it started, building its plant, the town of Wahatee, located a mile away, had only 9,000 inhabitants. Then, as should have been foreseen, workers and their families moved in. And Wahatee had a population of 35,000 now and was growing daily.

Most of the 35,000 were out of work at the present. And they would continue to be so unless the Appellate

Court decision was reversed.

They'd have to move away to look for other jobs.

That meant that the houses they'd purchased from Omness' company would go back to it. And Omness could not resell them. He'd suffer a staggering loss.

Never mind that his company was presently under investigation for using shoddy materials. That had nothing to do with this case.

Besides, though the houses were poorly constructed, their purchasers were getting them cheap. And their houses were being steam-heated at a very low price. The water used for cooking the nuclear plant was piped directly to them in its resultant hot state and the electricity was provided at a low rate by the plant. These two features were selling points advertised by Omness.

Forget all that, Goll told himself. Forget that—possibly—Omness is bribing Roffe and no telling how many other people. At least, he isn't putting poor materials or unsafe construction into the plant. He wouldn't dare do that even if he weren't being watched by the federal inspectors.

All other things, hankypanky or humanitarian, had to be put aside.

Under the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, the AEC (then the regulatory organ), could not issue a construction permit if it would be "inimical to . . . the health and safety of the public."

Both the administrative and technical staffs of the NRC stated that the Wahatee plant was safe.

Goll had studied its report and agreed that it was safe—if it operated as it was supposed to do.

If it did not, then a major accident might result, which would mean a major catastrophe. The city of Wahatee and the Wahatee National

Park tourists, numbering 12,000 in any one day during the summer, might be killed.

But no nuclear plant had so far blown up.

It was true that the LIFE generator was not nuclear. Its principle of operation was different. Yet it had been tested, and the NRC had passed on its reliability. But what kind of pressure might have been put on the official to declare for its reliability?

That was why he had decided to go to the area itself to inspect it and to talk to the people involved. The people would not be just the officials; they would include the People, the citizens of the town itself.

Sometimes, he thought of the Supreme Court, yes, admit it, of himself, as a giant eagle hovering in the sky. Like the eagle-spirit of some of the western Indian tribes. A protecting spirit, a father eagle. Soaring high up there, keeping a fierce and paternal eye upon his wards below.

He was the embodiment of the impartiality and the majesty of The Law.

HE HAD TO SMILE at this thought now. Consider his circumstances. He was anything but an eagle stooping, a spirit soaring. He was human, and at this moment in one of those comical or disgusting—depending on the viewpoint—postures inescapable to humankind.

But the twofold, or bipartisan, struggle within himself was real and relevant to the issue. Never mind the particular physical situation.

He was caught in a bind, in a tension between two conflicting demands. Wichever side he pondered had both advantages and disadvantages, like everything else in life. Even the conservation group fighting the construction of the complex was in a con-

tradiictory position. It had opposed the plant because of the possible danger of radiation and implosion to the people in the area. At the same time, it had had to admit that the LIFE generator could eliminate half of the pollution choking this nation, not to mention the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

-- WE THE PEOPLE of the United States, in Order to . . . promote the general Welfare . . .

And what, in this case, would promote the general welfare?

Voices reached him, gently parting the curtain he had put up between himself and the outside. The sound of whirling water partly drowned them, but he recognized them as those of the two youths. The one had just left the stall next door; the other had apparently been waiting for him.

"... reading this short story by Tincrowdor while you were on duty . . . says Cousteau predicted the oceans'd be dead within fifty years . . . now . . . data's all in . . . he's right . . . nothing being done about it . . . oil from crankcases . . . thrown away . . . spills . . . sulphuric, nitric acids . . . all draining down sewers . . . rivers . . . seas . . . junk, crap, plastics like you wouldn't believe . . . yeah? . . . so . . . when oceans die, eighty percent of our oxygen factory's dead . . . not with a bang, a whimper . . . cough . . . go blue in the face and choke . . ."

The gulping noise creased at the same time there was a lull in the hammering and screeching around the corner.

"He's only a science-fiction writer," one youth said. "What does he know? Science-fiction writers don't have a good track record when it comes to predicting."

"It isn't their function to predict ac-

curately," the other said, a defensive tone in his voice. "They speculate about the future; they invent every possible kind of future. Anyway, this death-of-the-oceans-bit isn't fiction anymore. It's straight scientific extrapolation. Unless we do something about it, there won't be any future. Not for us or our kids, you can bet on that."

"Then it's time we quit regarding the future as a plaything for science fiction writers and readers," the first said gravely. "It's time the lawmakers take over and regulate the future."

"With their track record?" the second said. "Besides, even if the legislators knew anything about science, which most of them don't, they won't or can't do anything unless the public wants them to do it. And John Doe and Mary Roe ain't going to worry about it until it's too late."

There was silence for a moment, punctuated by a crash from the front part of the room. Somebody bellowed in anger; it sounded like one of the hardhats. There was some cursing, then the room became relatively quiet again.

Goll heard a match scraping. One of the youths had lit up a cigarette.

"Yeah," one said. "You're always talking about pollution and how dumb the public is about it. But here you are, smoking, personally polluting yourself. That's dumb, Bill, dumb. You know what's going to happen to you personally, not too far in the future, if you don't quit smoking. Yet you won't. So how can you expect Mr. and Mrs. Enmasse to take a long-range view of something that they think doesn't affect them personally? They know what's going to happen, what's been predicted, anyway, if we don't quit messing up the world. But that's only relevant to the Other

Guy, the one that lives someplace else. It can't happen here, not to me. I'm okay, Jack."

"Oh, let's go," the other said. "What're we hanging around here for? Talk about your pollution, haw, haw!"

Still talking, they left.

It was as if they had provided the touchstone, or the key, or call it what you will, Goll thought. Within a short, though painful, minute, he was free. Free and open, he thought, chuckling weakly to himself. He no longer felt feverish or blocked, physically or mentally.

It was "general Welfare" that counted. Not just that of the people of the United States but of all peoples, though The Law decreed that that of the United States must come first. And general Welfare was a broader, or more extensive, term than the Founding Fathers could have dreamed of. Yet, in their unconscious wisdom, they had anticipated future requirements. *The general Welfare* did not just imply the immediate future, the short-range welfare. It implied the long-range effects of promotions for the future.

Whatever dangers the LIFE generator-destroyer threatened, it was vitally necessary. The possible—local catastrophes—had to be balanced against the inevitable—worldwide catastrophe.

Never mind that Omness and others of his breed were cheating wherever possible, piling one fortune on top of another as if multimillions of dollars would make them immortal. The evil they did must be balanced against the good. Though their motives were bad, the beneficial effects outweighed by far the malignant.

Indeed, if it weren't for men like Omness, the energetic, aggressive,

often vicious, schemers, conspirators, builders, amalgamators, call them what you will, not much would get done for the general Welfare.

Well, maybe that was an exaggeration, and, like most statements, required numerous qualifiers if the truth were to be expressed.

In essence, it was true.

And there was always The Law, as interpreted by the Constitution, to adjust, to regulate, to correct malfunctions.

Goll felt much better, much stronger, now that he knew what his decision would be.

Of course, he was only one of nine. But he was sure that the majority would agree with him. In one way or another, in the complicated yet basically simple ways that move people, his colleagues would arrive at the same decision.

He walked around the corner to the washbowls. And he stopped, staring.

The wall was down, and a rough passageway had been cleared through various obstructions, leaving a view of the room beyond. In it, several women stood by a line of washbowls, staring at him and the hardhats.

Goll quickly washed his hands, keeping his eyes on the mirror before him. His seventy-one year old face did not have the expression of peace and calm and quiet contentment it should have. Outrage and shock patinaed it. It wasn't a case of "future shock," as Toffler called it. It was "now shock." The future was here today, not ten years from now.

And, judging from the comments of some of the men, the Supreme Court would soon be considering the constitutionality of this new shock. What article of the Constitution, he thought, could apply to this case? Well, hopefully, it would be settled at

(cont. on page 35)

PATRICK HENRY, JUPITER, AND THE LITTLE RED BRICK SPACESHIP

GEORGE R. R. MARTIN

Illustrated by Joe Staton

After making a name for himself as a modern author of "hard-science" stories—ones in which the hardware is realistically detailed and works—George Martin pauses to consider the divergence of modern science, especially in space exploration, and the dreams we all once dreamed . . . and one man's attempt to revive the Dream. . . .

THE *Flycaster* looked like nothing so much as the remains of a fish, after everything edible had been removed. The head was left; the small, enclosed life cabin. And the cluster of fusion engines looked something like a tail. Between was only the long skelton, a tangled grid of duralloy girders and instrument paks open to the cold of space.

Plus Vito, strapped atop the skeleton near the harpoon gun so he wouldn't float away while Jan adjusted their orbit to match that of the old satellite below.

He studied it through his helmet visor while she moved them. Dark against the blue-green backdrop of Earth, it looked, Vito thought, like a metal bird, its twin solar panels spread like silvered wings.

This bird was flying dead, though. Jan had taken an energy readout as soon as they'd gotten close enough. Nil.

"We're matched," she said, over

the helmet radio. "It's all yours."

"Check," Vito said. He ran through the figures quickly on the wrist computer built into his spacesuit. Then, nodding satisfaction, he swung the gun around. Slow and careful in weightlessness, he inched it down until the figures on the sight matched those the computer had given him. The satellite was lined up in the crosshairs.

As always, he hesitated as he wrapped his gloved hand around the trigger. He had faith in the computer, but the harpoon gun he wasn't so sure about. It was salvage from a derelict whaler, boosted up from Earth on his order and welded into place atop the *Flycaster* by Jan. Vito thought it was even more ramshackle than the rest of the ship.

So he closed his eyes, and squeezed.

When he opened them again, the harpoon was halfway there, trailing a cloud of wire so fine that Vito saw only glints when it caught the sun and

winked at him. A brief instant later, one of the wings on the dead bird crumpled soundlessly.

Vito let out a noisy breath. "Got it," he said.

Then he waited patiently while Jan reeled it in. When the satellite bumped up against the far girder, he was ready. He floated over to it with a couple of magnetic clamps, and secured it to the girder beside the other catches. Four now, but the new one was the biggest of the lot; the instrument package alone was man-sized, the wings far bigger. But still small compared to the *Flycaster*.

He pulled himself back to the cabin when the catch was locked down, moving hand over hand down the girders with the ease of one long accustomed to weightlessness. Their quarters were the least impressive part of the *Flycaster*. Most of the space was filled with lockers and instrument panels and computer consoles. That left room for a small toilet cubicle, two chairs that reclined into couches, and Jan.

She was strapped into one of the chairs, checking something on the computer, when he entered. He kicked free of the airlock and floated over to her, dodging underwear and dirty socks. The door to the laundry locker was broken, and it popped open every time Jan moved the ship.

"That catch paid off the last of our expenses for the run," she told him. "And we won't even have to move back to hunting orbit. I've got a new prospect on the screens."

Vito grinned and kissed the back of her neck. "Great," he said. He started to strip off his spacesuit.

"It's an odd one, though," Jan said, still looking at the console. "Too big to be a satellite. Strap down and I'll boost us towards it."



Vito jammed his suit into a locker and started to gather socks, then thought better of it. He let them float free again and pulled himself down into the couch while Jan adjusted their orbit.

"Be there in an hour or so," she told him.

"Uh-huh," Vito said. "How big is big?"

"Very big," she said. "The reading I get say it's as big as us. What do you think it is?"

Vito shrugged. "Late twentieth century booster, maybe. They turned out real monsters back when they were using chemical fuels."

Jan shook her head. "I thought of that. But they were stage rockets, and the lower stages fell back into the atmosphere. This is as big as they were intact."

"And abandoned space lab, then," Vito suggested. "One of the Chinese mystery ships from thirty years ago. A dead cosmonaut the Russians never told us about. A flying saucer. I dunno. Could be anything. We'll see when we get there. At least we know one thing. It's money for us." He grinned at her, unstrapped, and started hunting down socks.

And hour later, with the laundry secure, he was less blase. They'd blown the target up on the cabin view-screen, and Vito was staring at it. "What," he said, "in the name of hell—is—that?"

"I thought you knew," Jan said. "Money, remember?"

Vito was not amused. "Goddamn," he said. "Look at it. Just *look* at it."

They looked.

It was big, slightly bigger than the *Flycaster*. But where the *Flycaster* was mostly girders and vacuum, this thing was solid. It was long and sleek and mirror-bright, and the sun flashed

and danced along its silvered flanks as it hung in the cold of space. It looked like a needle, and its lines shrieked speed.

"It's beautiful," Vito said, "but it doesn't make sense."

"It's utterly dysfunctional is what it is," Jan replied. "It can't be a spaceship. Looks like it was designed for atmosphere flight. But what's it doing up here."

Vito was already at the locker. "Get in as close as you can," he said. "I'm going to take an air gun, shoot over, and find out."

HIS NAME WAS Peter Van Dellinore, but no one ever used the whole clumsy thing. He was Van Junior to his father's business associates, Van to his society friends, and Pete to the people he really cared about. When it was all over, one of the commentators called him the last romantic. That was a telling comment. In an earlier age, he might have been Byron. He was tall and graceful, lean and athletic, with sandy blond hair and blue eyes. He had an easy smile and a volcanic temper, plus lots and lots of money.

He was the heir to the Van Dellinore fortune. His father, Clifford Van Dellinore, had founded CVD Holosystems Inc, and helped to initiate Continental Broadcasting, the first of the holo networks and still the biggest. And then there was Delnor Lasers, Lightway Computers, Douglas-Dellinore Aerospace, and New Era Duralloy. The Van Dellinore family owned huge blocs of stock in each.

The father, who'd grown up only moderately rich, was a brilliant, ruthless businessman. The son grew up utterly rich and utterly unlike his father. Pete was talented, no one questioned that, but in the eyes of Van Senior he lent his talents to the

oddest things.

Ray Lizak, who'd known him since college, understood Pete best. Lizak was a short, dark, colorless guy, who'd always dreamed of leading an exciting life but never seemed to find the time or the opportunity. Then he came to college, and wound up with Pete for a roommate. Within a year he'd raced sports cars, tried skindiving and skydiving, taken a weekend jaunt around the world, lost his virginity, and gotten arrested six times for taking part in all manner of strange demonstrations. Pete was a born leader of lost causes, and Lizak was a born right arm.

There was, for example, the incident of the Business Building. It was one of the oldest buildings on campus, but not old enough to rate as a land mark. Until Pete came along, everyone agreed that it was a monstrosity. It was huge and dark, built of crumbling red brick, and no two sides of it looked the same. On one side the roof was flat, on the other it slanted; here there was a square belfry without bells, there a thin steeple, here a rickety spiraling fire escape that curled half around the structure like a metal cobweb. Inside the lighting was poor, the floors slanted, and the acoustics terrible. Everyone hated the building.

But when the university announced plans to tear it down, and build a new modern building in its place, Pete shrieked. "Look at that building," he said to Lizak. "That building wasn't designed by an architect. It's utterly asymmetrical, almost like it just grew there. Everything's stuck together random. There's no building like it anywhere in the world, and there never will be again. It's so ugly it's beautiful. We can't let them tear it down and put up another shoebox."

On the day the wreckers came, six months later, nearly five hundred students were blocking their way, wearing buttons that said **SAVE THE LITTLE RED BRICK SCHOOLHOUSE**. They linked arms in a human barricade, and the university had to call the police to disperse them before the demolition could proceed.

That was Pete, at nineteen.

His movements got steadily more serious in his later college years. He led antiwar marches and ecology drives and sexual freedom celebrations, sometimes all three at once. He sat in for a month in front of the Biology Building to protest biowar research. He led a thousand people into the main plant of Douglas-Dellinore to disrupt the production of ABMs. His father didn't speak to him for almost a year, although he did stop making ABMs. The family rift was finally healed when Pete spearheaded a drive that got ten thousand signatures on a petition to protest cuts in the NASA budget. Douglas-Dellinore needed NASA.

Lizak liked to explain him to people who thought he was crazy. In fact, Lizak made a career of explaining Pete. "You just have to understand him," Lizak would say. "He's not insane, he just thinks he's St. George." But he'd only say that when he thought Pete had a fair-to-middlin chance of winning whatever particular fight he was leading. If Lizak figured the venture was doomed, the line would change to "... he just thinks he's Don Quixote."

Pete loved wine, beer, fast cars, flying, girls, poetry, pizza, french bread, fog, a good fight or a good thunderstorm, and interesting people who did interesting things. He hated war, liver, cold weather, and dull people who wore coats and ties. The thing he

loved most, and hated most, was space.

He loved the idea of the space program, and hated the reality of it. Once, in his college days, the university film society had run an odd double feature; an old science-fiction film about the first moon landing, followed by videotape highlights of the real thing. The film and the landing had both been before his time, but space travel was high on his list of things-to-do.

He attended, and preferred the film.

"The real thing was *dull*," he told Lizak afterwards. "They're doing it all wrong. Earth is bland and homogenized enough, they ought to leave space wild. Those damned astronauts act more like accountants than explorers. And dammit, that first-line-after-landing was the worst one I've ever heard. Armstrong had obviously been rehearsing it. Hell, it was probably written for him by a NASA pr man."

He went heavy into the space thing after that, and disliked most of it. He was very upset with the Soviet landing on Mars, when their first statement was a string of instrument readings. Still, he supported the space program. He figured they might get it right later on, Lizak explained.

Pete went to graduate school at his father's request, and mellowed a bit, but he always remained Pete. He spent some time in the offices atop the CBC Tower, being groomed as his father's assistant, and even scored a few minor business coups before he got bored. Then he started looking around for more interesting things to do.

Pete had just turned twenty-six when the Soviets announced their Jupiter mission. The *Jupiter* (Pete al-

ways said the Russian space program was utterly without imagination) was being built at their orbital docks, for a launch date nearly a year off.

The NASA announcement about the construction of the *Patrick Henry* came less than a week later, and stirred a considerable amount of interest. The Jupiter flyby would be the first real race in the fifty-year history of the space race, it seemed; two ships, leaving almost at the same time, for the same target.

Pete was one of the people who was interested. He applied for a berth on the *Patrick Henry*.

"Why not?" he told a reporter when the story got leaked to the press. "I'm young, I know lasers and computers and fusion engines, I've flown enough. The trip's a great adventure, and I'd be a definite asset to the crew."

NASA was not amused. Someone asked them about Pete at the press conference when they announced Donaldson's appointment as commander of the *Patrick Henry*. The mission chief just shook his head. "This is a scientific research mission, not an adventure. We don't need any adventurers. They tend to be unstable."

Pete probably would have answered them, but the timing was all wrong. Only hours after that conference, Clifford Van Dellinore died. There was a funeral and a period of mourning and a power struggle, and Pete didn't say anything publicly for months.

He'd inherited thirty-seven per cent of the stock of Van Dellinore Enterprises. His younger sister owned ten per cent, and other relatives shared another ten. The two big blocs were in the hands of his father's friends. Pete got on the phone, and came out chairman of the board. His father's business associates were a lit-

tle shocked that Van Junior wanted the job, but they were glad to give him a chance. It would have made old Van Senior happy, they thought.

Hah.

By the, NASA had announced the crew roster for the *Patrick Henry*. Pete was not on it. The ship was half-complete up in orbit near Shepard Station. It was a dull black skeleton with most of its guts open to space for easy EVA repair. Only the forward section would be rigged with life-support systems. Some commentators said it look like an unfinished skyscraper.

That was all right. Soviet news holos from the Komarov Wheel made the *Jupiter* look like a giant gray tomato.

Both ships were to leave in February.

In July, Pete called a press conference atop the CBC Tower. All the networks and the papers were there, most of them represented by crack financial reporters. They were already nicknaming Pete the Boy Wonder of Upper Wall, although he hadn't done anything more Wondrous than assuming a title.

Until then.

"I suppose you're all wondering why I called you here today," he began, grinning. Lizak, Pete's communications aide, was the only one to laugh. They were financial reporters. "I'll keep it brief and to the point. Van Dellinore Enterprises is sending a ship a Jupiter. To safeguard our investment, I'll got along."

There was a confused silence. Someone laughed. "You're kidding," someone else shouted.

"Hardly," Pete said.

"You mean you're really building a ship? Where?"

Pete grinned. "In my backyard.

Where else?"

VITO LANDED ON the silver ship just a few feet away from the airlock. Almost immediately Jan's voice came crackling over the helmet radio. "What is it?"

"I don't know yet," Vito said patiently. His boots kept him clamped to the hull. He unlocked the metalyst from his leg, bent, and took a quick reading. "The hull is duralloy," he reported. "That tell you anything?"

"It can't be more than sixty years old, then," she said. "Duralloy didn't crowd out steel until early Twenty-One."

Vito locked the metalyst back into place and headed for the airlock. He'd have no problem getting in. The outer door was wide open. He reached the portal, bent and grabbed, pulled himself down. The lock chamber was large, bigger than its counterpart on the *Flycaster*. And the inner door was open too.

"Everything's wide," Vito reported. "The thing's airless, whatever else it is." He pushed himself down through the lock with a burst from his airgun, into what should have been the control cabin.

It was dark in there, but not completely black. The forward wall was half transparent plastic, a thick curved window on the stars. Vito could see Earth turning far below, and the *Flycaster* outlined against its bulk. Jan had parked in a parallel orbit three hundred yards away.

In the reflected Earthlight that filtered through the plastic, Vito studied the cabin.

"Why so quiet?," Jan asked. "Is everything all right?"

"Yeah," he said. "Just looking around."

"What's it like in there?"

"Gutted," Vito said. "It is a ship, or it was, but there's nothing here. Just an empty cabin. Mountings for a couple of couches, but no couches. Control panels, but no controls. Just holes where the buttons and keyboards should be. Lots of garbage floating around the cabin too. Tools and squeeze tubes and bundles of wire, that kind of stuff."

He pushed off a bulkhead and floated over to a bank of lockers. "No provisions," he said after pulling several open. "No spacesuits in the suit locker either." For long minutes he rummaged around the cabin, pulling open whatever door would pull, prying apart panels, and keeping up a running account for Jan. "No power at all, the circuit boards are gone, or were never installed. Life-support system isn't here. There is a computer console, but no computer that I can see."

"Sounds like somebody got here before us," Jan suggested. "Everything valuable has already been removed."

"Not everything," Vito said, as he kicked himself towards the airlock. "There's still the hull. Duralloy, remember. *Solid* duralloy."

He stopped inside the airlock chamber. There was something he had missed. Clipped to the wall; four old-style oxygen bottles, their gauges all down to empty. And a name, stenciled lengthwise down each of them.

"*Challenger*," read Vito.

YOU CAN'T REALLY build a spaceship in your backyard, of course, and Pete never intended to. His plan was to assemble the *Challenger* in orbit beside the *Patrick Henry*. Van Dellinore Enterprises was prepared to pay NASA a handsome rental for the use of the shuttle facilities at the Cape and the orbital construction yards of Shepard Station.

He hadn't convinced NASA to go along with that when he announced it at the press conference, but he was fairly confident he could. After all, NASA always needed money, and he had money. Besides, he had already accomplished a more impressive miracle; he'd sold the *Challenger* to his own board of directors.

As the ultimate advertising gimmick.

It all tied in beautifully. He'd command the ship, and that would put the Van Dellinore name on millions of lips. The *Challenger* would be designed and built by Douglas-Dellinore, its hull made of solid New Era duralloy. The shipboard computer would be a Lightway 999, Delnor Lasers would provide the comm link to Earth. And CBC would have exclusive rights to the holocausts of the first ship to orbit Jupiter.

The price tag was around a half-billion, but Pete could be very eloquent when he wanted to. And it didn't hurt to own thirty-seven per cent of the stock either.

So Van Dellinore Enterprises was to have a spaceship. What kind of a spaceship didn't become clear until about a week later.

That was when the engineering team from Douglas-Dellinore visited Pete in the CBC Tower. It was the same team that had designed the *Patrick Henry* for NASA, and they were proud of their work. The blueprints they gave him were refinements of the same design.

Pete shook his head. "I don't want a box kite," he said. "NASA has a box kite. I want to do this right."

"But this is the optimal design," one of the engineers insisted. "The *Jupiter* is much less efficient, I assure you. I'd stake my—"

"I don't want the *Jupiter* either,"

Pete interrupted. "I want a spaceship that looks like a spaceship should look, dammit."

The project chief scratched his head. "What exactly should a spaceship look like, Mr. Van Dellinore?"

Pete told them.

Afterwards, one of them stood in the outer office, mumbling and shaking his head. "It doesn't make any sense," he told anyone who would listen. "He wants something out of an old movie, not a real ship. He even wants a window. It took us a half hour to talk him out of tail fins. It's a joke. The man is crazy."

Ray Lizak stopped to talk to him. "Pete's not crazy," Lizak said. "You just have to understand him. He thinks he's St. George, and he can't go riding off to Jupiter on a plow horse, can he?"

As it turned out, the initial design wasn't all that much different than the *Patrick Henry*. They just pressed the parts together a little more tightly, took out a few backup systems, and sheathed the works in a slim silver hull.

Meanwhile, trouble was stirring on other fronts. Although the CBC commentators were hailing the *Challenger* as "a bold step that will open space to the common man," everyone else was taking potshots at the venture. Particularly NASA.

"My only reaction is amusement," Commander Donaldson of the *Patrick Henry* told the press. "Space exploration is not a game, but no one appears to have told Van Dellinore. We're going to Jupiter on a scientific mission. He's going on a lark."

"This is a new height in recklessness," another NASA spokesman said. "Space travel is far too dangerous for anyone but the most highly trained personnel. When the time comes for

private citizens to travel to other worlds, commercial service will be opened in safe, government-inspected ships. But that time is not yet. No, of course Van Dellinore will not be permitted to use our facilities. We will have no part in helping him to kill himself."

For a long time, the Senate Space Committee had been sitting on a bill that would ban private citizens from space unless they had a NASA-stamped "space visa." Now the bill was finally reported out onto the floor. Favorably.

Pete sat back through most of this. Then he responded.

"All right," he said in an August press conference. "If we can't use their facilities we'll build our own. And we *will* beat them to Jupiter."

Denied use of the Cape as a launch point, Pete bought the abandoned Woomera facilities of the defunct British space program, for conversion into a modern spaceport.

Denied the NASA shuttles, Pete had Douglas-Dellinore build him two of his own. The *Pogo Stick* and the *Leapfrog* were twins to the NASA craft in every way, until Pete had racing stripes painted down their sides.

Denied use of Shepard Station, Pete announced plans for the construction of a private space station. The press promptly nicknamed it the Dellinore Doughnut.

By September, the *Patrick Henry* was complete and testing was about to begin. The thirty-man crew was just starting to ferry up on NASA shuttles. Reports from the Soviets indicated that the *Jupiter* was in its final stages. But Pete was still in the process of hiring his construction workers and the rest of his six-man crew.

By October, initial tests had been completed on the *Patrick Henry*, and

Commander Donaldson announced that the ship was the finest he had ever served on. The Soviets named Colonel Tahl to command the newly-completed *Jupiter*. And at Woomera the final touches were being put on Pete's spaceport.

Public interest was running at a fever pitch, and bets were being made freely. From Las Vegas, the word went out that Tony the Croat had cited the odds as *Patrick Henry* 5-2, *Jupiter* 3-1, *Challenger* 50-1.

During the first week of November, the NASA shuttles began to provision the *Patrick Henry* for the long voyage. The *Jupiter* was just back from a test run around Luna, and the first load of parts for the Dellinore Doughnut had been lofted into orbit by the *Pogo Stick*. And Douglas-Dellinore had sent its best men to the CBC Tower to tell Pete that he'd lost.

"I'm sorry, Van," the project chief told him. "We just can't make it. We have to launch by February so Jupiter will be in the right position when we get there. And we can't. We just can't. Even with two crews up there, we'll be lucky if we have the Doughnut finished by then, let alone the *Challenger*."

"All right," Pete said. "Forget the Doughnut. Just build the *Challenger*."

"The construction crew needs some place to stay, Van. They can't just live in there spacesuits."

Pete considered that. "Do it this way. Send the crew up. Keep the *Pogo Stick* up there with them. The *Leapfrog* can haul up fresh supplies each trip, with the components. We'll run on one shuttle."

The project chief looked around for support. One of his assistants was scribbling on a legal pad. "Still won't work," the man said finally. "With only one shuttle, we'll barely be able

to get the parts up there by February. We can't do it."

"Dammit!," Pete shouted. "Quit telling me why it can't be done. If we can't launch February, then we'll launch in March. You'll just have to make the *Challenger* faster than the others!"

The chief sighed. He was getting very tired of this. "It isn't that simple, Van. If we launch at the wrong time, it makes the whole operation very inefficient. We'd need a lot more fuel, a lot more thrust. That'd mean bigger engines, more powerful. Which gives the ship more mass. It'd mean redesigning the whole thing."

"No. Just juggle what you've got. Cut some mass. Figure on a crew of one instead of six, that gets rid of a lot of provisions and life-support gear. Cut out the probe bank and the sensors and you cut the mass by a third. Junk all the backup systems. Double the engine size, give me twice the potential thrust and the fuel to match. Then figure how long it'd take to get there."

There were mouths open all over the room.

"But—but the waste—" one man blurted.

"No sensors," another said in shock. "You won't be able to run the experiments. How can you find out anything about Jupiter?"

Pete stood up. "I'll land," he said. And left them open mouthed.

There is a verified report that at least two of them actually believed him.

The crew of the *Patrick Henry* celebrated Christmas aboard their ship, on a shakedown cruise around Luna. The Soviets announced that they were moving their launch date up a week to late January. And Pete did an interview show on CBC.

"This is the way it should have

been done all along," he said, grinning. "With style. Space is the last refuge of romance, the only home left for the dreamers and the wildmen who are out of place on Earth. I'm going to take the stars away from the bureaucrats and the technicians, and give them back to the people who can appreciate them."

Above, the first hull sections of the *Challenger* were being fitted around her giant fusion motors by a crew on Christmas triptime.

OUTSIDE AGAIN, between the sun and stars, Vito made his way along the hull and listened to Jan.

"I wish we had a library computer," she was saying. "The name sounds vaguely familiar, but I can't place it. I'm sure it'd be in the books somewhere. In any case, it was quite a while ago. Early Twenty-One at least, maybe late twentieth."

The sun was behind Vito's shoulder. Its reflections were long silver sabres flashing between his feet. He looked down and smiled, thinking of the dull black of the *Flycaster*. "She's pretty, whatever she was," he said. "I wonder who built her."

"A mad man," Jan said. "It's totally out of place up here. That ship has no excuse for existing."

Vito didn't reply. He'd found the emergency repair panel to the engine compartment. Just a panel, not an airlock. He unclipped the laser, sheared off the steel bolts that held it in place, and pulled the panel up. Then he slowly pulled himself down inside.

There was no window here, only the starlight that shone in from the empty space where the panel had been. Vito turned on his suit light. He stood in a clearing amid a forest of gleaming black machinery.

"Well?" Jan asked.

"The engines are here," he said.

"Fusion-powered, and plenty big. Old, of course. We could get as much thrust from a third the size." He grinned. "I'll bet they had a hell of a kick, though. The *Challenger* was no orbital tug, I'll tell you that."

Jan was suddenly excited. "Excellent," she said. "Do you think they're still functional? Maybe we could rig it to move under its own power?"

"Uh-uh," Vito said. His lights prowled restlessly through the cold, hard dark between the engines. "There are no controls here, either. And no fuel, of course. And I'll bet the engines aren't hooked up to anything. The big components are here, but none of the fine work has been done."

He looked around again. "You know," he said, "I don't think this ship ever went anywhere."

IN THE END, of course, they crushed him. They always do.

The Space Visa Bill was signed into law during the first week of January. "In a way, the Van Dellinore incident was a good thing," its sponsor said. "It woke us up to the need for firmer regulations of space travel. And I'm proud to say we woke up pretty fast."

During the second week of January, the Douglas-Dellinore work crew returned to Earth under threat of indictment. They had just finished fitting together the hull of the *Challenger*.

During the third week of January, Pete's board of directors revolted and kicked him out.

"This project has gotten entirely out of hand," the leader of the opposition said at the meeting. "We voted to support a half-billion doollar ad campaign to generate a lot of favorable publicity. We were supposed to come out looking like benefactors of mankind, and the ship was going to work beautifully and give all of our

products a boost. The holo documentary was going to be a sensation.

"Well, it hasn't worked out that way. Costs have tripled, and all the publicity has been bad. Instead of responsible men doing serious research, we've been painted as reckless fools engaged in a cheap stunt. Safety margins have been cut to the point where a disaster is very possible, and I don't have to tell you what a black eye that would give us. And who's going to go to see a holo about the third ship to Jupiter? Meanwhile, our chairman tells the nation that we're doing it all to make space safe for spaceheads.

"And now, *now*, he comes before us and asks us to defy the law. Well, I've had it. I say we cut our losses, abandon the Jupiter project, and replace Mr. Van Dellinore as our chairman."

He called for a vote. Pete still had thirty-seven per cent of the stock. His sister stood by him. But the opposition had everyone else.

He resigned with singular ill grace. "Fuck you," he told the directors as he handed over the gavel. "If you won't back me, I'll do it without you." Then he stalked out.

The new chairman watched him leave and shook his head. "Mr. Van Dellinore's selection was a sad mistake," he commented. "He's not made of the same stuff as his father. I almost think he's deranged."

Lizak who'd been left behind with Pete's proxies, sighed. "No, no," he told them. "You just have to understand him. Pete's not crazy, Mr. Chairman, he just thinks he's Don Quixote."

Pete, meanwhile, still had a considerable personal fortune. He tried to use it. He liquidated most of his assets overnight, and tried to get the crew back on the job. "I'll pay you myself," he told them. "I'll double

your salaries. I'll pay for attorneys if you're arrested. This is not a time to quit. We can't let the bastards beat us. The whole world is watching to see if we can do it. You men are part of history."

They applauded when he finished. And that was all. They were practical men, and Pete's dream was just a job to them.

During the final week of January, the *Jupiter* left, and the *Patrick Henry* conducted its last tests. Pete, still unable to get a crew into orbit, offered to hire the Russian workers who had pieced together the *Jupiter*. The Soviets ignored him.

During the first week of February, the *Patrick Henry* set out. Pete announced plans to lift into orbit and complete the *Challenger* with a space-green crew of unemployed aerospace workers. But when he tried to leave for Woomera, they arrested him for attempting to exit Earth without a visa.

No sooner had he bailed himself out than the new chairman of Van Dellinore Enterprises announced the impending sale of the *Pogo Stick*, the *Leapfrog*, and the Woomera facilities to NASA. Pete offered to up the price. The company refused to sell to him. He filed suit.

By the time the case got to court, the *Jupiter* had crossed the orbit of Mars, with the *Patrick Henry* close behind. It was around that time that Pete finally gave up.

Needless to say, he never got anywhere near Jupiter. In fact, he only got to Shepard Station once. And that was twenty years later. As Senator Van Dellinore, chairman of the Space Committee, they insisted on him giving a speech to the first boat of colonists for Ganymede.

"**W**ILL IT WORK?" Vito asked, on

AMAZING

his way across the gulf between the *Challenger* and the *Flycaster*.

"Just a sec," came Jan's voice, "I'm checking." Then, "Well, I think we can handle it, though the mass is really a little more than we're equipped for. It's too bad we don't have more power. This'll be slow, but we'll get there eventually. I figure we'll have to bring it in real tight, practically tie the two ships together."

"The hull is duralloy," Vito reminded her. "We can't punch through that as easily as steel. We'll have to shoot for the airlock and the engine panel."

"And the window," Jan said. "Don't forget the window."

"Yeah. We can smash through that easy enough."

He swung by the skeleton of the *Flycaster*, reached out, and pulled himself in. Then, swiftly, he began to move toward the harpoon gun.

JUPITER has thirteen moons now. One of them is an unfinished skyscraper called the *Patrick Henry*. Tour ships lift off every day from the hotels on Ganymede and Callisto and circle it, while the guides tell the old tale of her narrow two-day victory and later disaster.

The *Jupiter*, brought down to Earth and reassembled part by part, fills an entire wing of the Moscow Institute. The plaque on her hull brags of how she rescued the crew of the distressed *Patrick Henry*, and returned to Earth triumphant.

THEY'VE PIERCED HER four times with their cruel harpoons, and now the *Challenger* is being reeled in. Vito stands in the skeleton of the *Flycaster*, watching, and wondering what sort of price she'll bring.

—GEORGE R.R. MARTIN

Fundamental Issue (cont. from page 6)

a lower level.

As he left, he turned to look at the sign above the doorway. Yes, just as he'd thought. The MEN was gone. In its place: PERSONS' CONVENIENCE.

His wife looked around as he settled down beside her.

"What's going on?" she said, nodding at the sign. She was too short-sighted to make out its letters.

"Change," he said. "It's not determined yet whether it's progress or regress."

"You look much better. Did everything, uh, come out all right?"

"All systems are go. I feel fine."

She stabbed the point of her pencil at the crossword puzzle. "Do you believe in coincidence?"

"Only when it happens."

"Would you believe it? One of the words I have to figure out was

Wahateel!"

"This has been a strange day," he said. "What was its definition?"

"It's from an Oneida Indian word, meaning *He sat down*. Why in the world would the Indians name a place something like that? *Who* sat down? Why? What happened there to make that so memorable?"

"Perhaps he was a chief who sat down to make an important decision. Who knows? Great decisions and deeds spring from little ones. Perhaps the Oneida knew that, and so they memorialized the little one."

The voice of the announcer spoke again. Goll plucked the number of their flight from the mumble. He stood up.

"Come on. We have to keep on going."

—PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER

PATRICK HENRY

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R. Faraday Nelson is the author of two recently-published Laser books—Blake's Progress and Then Beggars Could Ride—both judged markedly superior to that imprint's usual level of quality. His last appearance here was "Who's The Red Queen?" (March); he returns with a story about a determined woman and her consort and the—

FLESH PEARL

R. FARADAY NELSON

Illustrated by Steve Fabian

AFTER MAKING GOOD its escape, the little starship Cobra settled into orbit around the sullen, glowering, red giant star Betelgeuze, four thousand and twenty million million miles from Earth, in a sector of the galaxy seldom traveled by man in these Twilight Ages; indeed seldom traveled by man in the Age of the Solar Empire, before the Interstellar Civil War.

I was in the co-pilot's seat, next to the young Princess. She turned toward me, Betelgeuze's ruddy bloody light gleaming on the rippling folds of her gold lamé coveralls, glowing in her wild golden blonde hair that hung straight to the small of her back, glittering demonically in her triumphant eyes.

"I told you!" she told me. "I told you I could do it. All doors open to she who dares, Consort Charlie!"

"I have to admit it," I admitted. "When you told me you could hold a whole planet for ransom, I thought you were coo-coo, Princess."

"That's because you don't think on the right scale. When the stagecoach was invented, it took a while before someone held one up. When the train

was invented, it took a while before there was such a thing as a train robber. And planes had been flying for quite a while before the first skyjacking. And nobody believed a starship could be skyjacked until someone did it."

"But a whole planet . . ."

"The next logical step. With modern weapons developed to the point they are, it was inevitable. Now there will be a fad for planetnapping. We've got to hurry and head back or the small fry will skim off all the cream before we . . ."

"Head Back? I've been thinking about that, Princess. We've got the ransom here in the hold. Right? A footlocker full of californium 252. Now, since californium is worth five hundred and thirty billion dollars a pound . . ."

"What are you trying to tell me, Consort Charlie?"

"Just that we've got enough! We could buy up one of the more modest planets and spend the rest of our lives ruling it. What more could you want?"

"You know what I want, little man."

I sighed. "I know."

She wanted a galactic empire, not one planet under her rule, but thousands, all the worlds that bowed to the Solar Empire before the Interstellar War. And that would take money. Money to buy weapons. Money to buy men. Money to pay for a war that would either reunite all humankind under her reign or blast all humankind to oblivion.

She returned her attentions to the controls. "Get on those sensors, Consort Charlie! We have to find a good hiding place for our little footlocker."

We're not really future rulers of the Galaxy, I thought. We're common pirates looking for some desert island to bury our treasure on.

But out loud I said, "Aye aye, Princess!"

THERE WERE only the two of us, the Princess and me, on board the Cobra. Most of the time one of us slept while the other sat in the cockpit watching to see that the computers in the automatic pilot didn't do anything stupid.

That's why I happened to be asleep when the Princess sighted the other starship. The first I knew about it was the loud clank of our magnetic clamps on its hull; a sound so unusual that, as I sat bolt upright, I could not at first identify it.

In an instant I was scrambling toward the cockpit, trying to run and slip into my gray coveralls at the same time. Of course I tripped and fell, but was on my feet again quickly enough, with nothing worse than a cut on my forehead.

And of course as I burst into the cockpit, my zipper was still stuck, and my coveralls were not covering all, at least not in front.

The Princess was gazing out the left



porthole with intense concentration, but she did find time to glance at me and snap, "You're out of uniform, Consort Charlie!"

"Don't you think I know it?" I muttered, struggling with my zipper.

She did not reply. Her gaze had swung once again to something out there in space, beyond the porthole.

Abandoning my jammed zipper, I looked out too, over her shoulder.

It was a much larger ship than our little Cobra; we were clinging to its forward section like a pilot fish clinging to a shark. It was older than the Cobra too, much older. In fact, the chipped and faded white disk insignia amidships would seem to indicate that it dated from the time of the Solar Empire. The surface was pitted and scarred from needle-nose to tattered tailfins, probably from meteoric dust, and the area around the cockpit was torn open, as if from some violent internal explosion.

"Princess, what . . ." I began.

She darted me a look of annoyance. "Can't you zip that thing up?"

I thought, *Man has built starships that fly faster than light; why can't he invent a zipper that doesn't jam?*

She went on, "Do you want to explore that ship with your fly open?"

"No, Princess. Of course not. Just wait a second."

Finally I got the zipper going and quickly zipped it up, wondering wistfully if it would jam again when I tried to get it open. I didn't relish the idea of spending the rest of my life in those same coveralls.

The Princess was already putting on her space armor.

"Princess," I said. "Do you think it's wise for us to go on board this hulk?"

"Why not? I checked it on the sensors. There's nothing alive on it. If we can get its computer working, maybe

it'll tell us something, like which planet in this system is a safe place to drop off a little footlocker."

"But should both of us go? I mean, if something happens . . ."

"Suit up, little man," she commanded sharply, then added, glancing at my zipper, "If you can!"

THE PRINCESS was right, as usual.

There was no one alive on the hulk.

But there were dead men there, in plenty; dead woman too, and a few children. I did not like to examine them too closely, but it seemed they'd all died of some sort of plague. I had been an orderly once, back on Earth, but I'd never seen symptoms like these before. The bodies had swelled up until some were twice normal size and bloated and puffy as if they'd—but that was impossible—died of overeating. I couldn't say how long they'd been there. It could have been a hundred years. It could have been a thousand. The air was gone and the vacuum and cold of outer space that had come in was a better preservative than anything the Egyptians had ever thought of.

There was no artificial gravity of course, so the Princess and I made our way through the corpse-strewn hallways, part of time walking on our magnetic boots, part of the time drifting, almost swimming, through a darkness that seemed to devour the feeble brilliance of our helmet-lamps.

I did not like to touch the plague victims, though it seemed unlikely any micro-organisms would still be on them after all this time. They were so huge, so ugly, so fat . . . but they too were adrift, and we often had to push them out of the way, sending one bumping against another so that the movement was communicated to all the bodies in a hallway, setting them in motion in a ghastly imitation of life.

We had entered through the exploded cockpit, and to the cockpit we returned after a fruitless tour of the ship. From the cockpit we could see—thank God—the stars, and that helped to allay the nauseous claustrophobia that had threatened to overcome me in the corridors.

The Princess was not like me; the sights that had made me sick and depressed seemed to fill her with an unholy glee, as if nothing delighted her more than romping through a shipload of cadavers. I could hear her glee in her voice as her words burst in on me from my helmet earphones. "Look here, Consort Charlie! This cockpit wasn't blown up in any ordinary way. See how everything is squashed flat against the floors and walls? It's as if some terrific pressure built up in here, then finally burst out through the hull."

"You don't say. Well, guess we'd better be getting back."

"Don't be silly. I haven't tried to get a readout from the computer yet."

She tried. The computer was as dead as everything else on this drifting tomb.

"Satisfied, Princess?"

"No, wait. There may be some sort of written records. Help me look." I didn't want to touch anything, but—maybe it was habit—I couldn't disobey her, no matter what damn nonsense she cooked up. There was a force behind those cold glittering blue eyes, an almost supernatural force. I used to think I loved her. I did love her! But love is one of those words that, like God, explains everything and thus explains nothing.

It was she who found the handwritten log book.

She leafed through it in that way she has, reading a whole page at a single glance. When I'd first met her I'd thought she was fooling me, that

nobody could read that fast.

She wasn't fooling.

Now she slammed the book and looked at me, frowning, the light from her helmet-lamp transforming her face into a mask of shadows and jagged light. "This is the log of the ship's doctor," she said softly. "This was a medical survey ship from the Solar Empire. They landed on one of the planets of this star system and caught a disease there that this doctor couldn't cure . . . a kind of cancer. Every man, woman and child on the ship caught it!"

"Well, we've learned something valuable here, after all," I said brightly. "Don't land on any planets in this star system! Let's go, Princess!"

She laid a gloved hand on my arm, holding me. "No, wait, Consort Charlie. Don't you want to hear how this doctor—his name was Dr. Markham—don't you want to hear what he did?"

"Tell me if you want to tell me!"

There was a note of hysteria in my voice. I could hear it myself.

"He killed the whole crew. He went through the ship and shot everyone."

There was a long silence, then I said, "Including himself? Did he end up by committing suicide?"

"I suppose so, but of course the last entry in the log comes before that."

There was an awe in her voice that I had seldom heard before. She admired men like Dr. Markham, men who could kill when the situation called for killing.

But now at last she was willing to come with me back to our own ship, where I made sure our decontamination routine was carried out to the last frightfully finicky detail.

WE HAD NO WAY OF DETERMINING

which of the planets circling Betelgeuze was the plague planet, so I urged the Princess to steer clear of all of them. There were other stars, with other safer planets. I should have known better than to have mentioned safety to her. It was risk that she loved, that held a terrible hypnotic fascination for her.

Besides, she argued, we shouldn't waste time flitting from one star system to another, looking for some place to hide our footlocker. There were worlds waiting to be plundered, back in the inhabited part of the galaxy, colonized worlds that ringed the double star Sirius, the triple star Alpha Centauri, even the Sun itself. If we didn't plunder them, someone else would beat us to it.

A compromise!

We would not land on any planet, but would seek out some small lifeless asteroid where no micro-organism had ever evolved, and there our treasure would wait for us until we returned, out of reach not only of passing treasure-hunters, but also of any life-forms native to this stay-system. It was an elegant solution.

Asteroids were rare around Betelgeuze; a quick sensor sweep of the system told us that. But there was one asteroid only a few hundred miles away, in an orbit almost parallel to the plague ship's orbit.

"I don't know . . ." I muttered as we approached it. It was unlike any asteroid I'd ever seen before, and I didn't like the looks of it. Instead of the jagged hunk of rock I would have expected, this asteroid was like a smooth sphere, about two miles in diameter, slightly irregular in shape and, in the red glow of Betelgeuze, a disturbing fleshy color; in fact it looked like a pale pinkish-white pearl adrift in the void.

"Are you afraid, little man?" the

Princess taunted.

"Frankly, yes. Maybe it would be better to . . ."

"If I had listened to you, we would have an empty footlocker in the hold! Haven't you learned yet, Consort, that all the prizes in life go to those who take them, not to cowards who constantly shrink from dangers that may never materialize? How long will it be before you learn this one simple lesson?"

"All right, all right," I grumbled, reaching for the controls. We maneuvered closer, finally gently bumped the surface of the thing. Our grapplers dug in, mooring us firmly.

The Princess climbed out of the pilot's seat and reached for her inverted-fishbowl spacehelmet.

"Wait," I said.

"For what?"

"Before you put on your helmet . . . I mean, if you don't mind . . ."

"Yes? Out with it!"

"Could I . . . kiss you?"

"Kiss me? Now?"

"Just on the cheek."

"Damn fool!" If she said anything more I couldn't hear it through her helmet.

NEITHER OF US was prepared for what we found on the pearl-like asteroid.

It had a very thin surface, so that a few explosive blasts from our stinger-pistols was all it took to break through, and under the surface we found a vast cavern, lit by the dull red light that filtered in through the cavern's translucent ceiling.

The second surprise came right after the first.

There was air in the asteroid!

It came rushing out the hole we had blasted, turning to a cloud of swirling pseudo-snowflakes as soon as it hit the void. The Princess pulled her-

self through the hole, using the servo-motors in her armor to give her the strength to fight the current of escaping air.

I followed her in, dragging the footlocker behind me.

No sooner were we inside than I noticed that the hole was closing itself behind us.

"Princess," I said nervously into my helmet-earphones. "We blasted our helmet-microphone. "We could be trapped in here."

"Nonsense," came her contemptuous voice from my helmet-earphones. "We blasted our way in. We can blast our way out again."

She was drifting toward the floor of the cavern with as little hesitation as if she were entering her own front-room.

"Princess!" I saw dim moving shapes down there ahead of her. "There's something down there!"

"Of course there is! But it's just plants. There had to be plants here to make the air."

With a few spurts of my shoulderjets I was down there beside her. Sure enough, there was some kind of spongy plantlife lining the cavern floor, moving sluggishly in the aircurrents set in motion by the airleak above . . . though now the leak was almost closed.

"Nothing so surprising about that," she went on coolly. "Enough sunlight comes in through the translucent ceiling to make photosynthesis possible. And the constant supply of meteoric dust provide soil . . ."

"What meteoric dust?"

"You're always so careful, yet you didn't notice that the instruments in the Cobra registered a powerful electrostatic charge coming from this asteroid. It's constantly using its electrostatic field to suck in meteoric dust from outside, right through that self-

sealing skin. My guess is that the skin itself is alive, or semi-alive."

I shuddered.

"Test the air," she commanded.

I ran a quick test on my hip-analyzer, then said in amazement, "It's Earth-normal!"

"Then it must be breathable."

"I suppose so, but . . ."

She was already unsnapping the seal of her helmet.

"No!" I cried.

But now her helmet was off and she was grinning at me in the dim red light, shaking her head so that her long golden hair swirled in a serpentine halo around her head. "You see?" she laughed, "There's no danger."

"Put that helmet back on, Princess!"

"No, you take yours off . . . that is, if you want to kiss me." She puckered up her lips and closed her eyes, teasing me.

I hesitated, then unsnapped my own airseal and took off my helmet. Her lips were warm and moist against mine, but when I embraced her our spacearmor clanked together.

She laughed again and, taking my gloved hand in hers, led me, almost dragged me, through the jungle of sponge-like plants. Our boots, when they connected with the ground, kicked up clouds of gray shimmering dust-motes; she was probably right about the meteoric dust.

Some of the dust got up my nose and I sneezed.

"God bless you," she said mockingly, then halted abruptly, pointing. "Look there!"

I looked. A dark hole, like a well, gaped in the floor. There was a cold, steady breeze moving in the direction of that hole; all the sponge-plants bent toward it.

"There must be other caverns, deeper down," she said with ill-

surprised excitement. "Come on." Without waiting for my answer, she dove into the well, graceful as a shark.

What could I do but plunge after her, the footlocker clutched awkwardly in my arms?

"Isn't this far enough?" I asked her wearily.

"Not quite. I want to reach the center of the asteroid."

But she did halt, turn around in the air and float there, looking at me with affectionate contempt.

"How do you know we haven't reached it already? How do you know we haven't passed it?" I demanded.

"I don't think so, Consort Charlie. Haven't you noticed the pattern of the passageways we've been through? It's a steep downward spiral, with the passage growing steadily narrower. It's got to be leading to something. And since this sphere was about two miles in diameter and, according to the distance reading on the Cobra's directional beam, we've come about one mile, that something can't be very far from here." The walls, for some time now, had been blowing with a dim green phosphorescence, a glow that seemed to turn her eager face into some kind of Halloween mask.

"Okay, Princess. But what if that something is a . . . a stomach?"

"A stomach?" She looked thoughtful, but not too surprised.

"Sure. I've been noticing things, too, and if you ask me this isn't an asteroid we're in, it's some kind of living creature, some kind of vast space animal. Don't you think we'd better turn around and head back while we still can?"

"Not at all! If this is an animal, as you say, it still has a stable orbit. We can leave it and find it again, store our footlocker here, and other foot-

lockers like it. We might even make our headquarters here. Who would dream of looking for us inside the belly of a space-whale?"

"You and your footlockers! Every bone in my body aches from dragging this thing along with us." I pushed the locker away from me.

"Stop complaining. My bones ache too, but we must have only a little ways yet to go."

"Could you wait just a minute? I'd at least like to make some tests on the wall of this tunnel. Then we'll know if this really is a living thing we're inside."

She reluctantly agreed.

I examined the glowing passage wall.

It was semi-transparent, and it seemed to me I could see something like slowly pulsing arteries and veins imbedded in it. I shivered and cut off a small slice of the leathery substance.

I inserted it in my analyzer.

"Well?" the Princess said impatiently. "What is it?"

"It's human flesh," I whispered.

"Well well," she said softly. *Now*, I thought, *she'll turn back*.

I was wrong. She gestured toward the footlocker, ordered me to carry it, and set off once again in the same direction as before.

I sprang after her, grabbed her by the arm. She was the dominant one of us two. I made no mistake about that. But I was physically stronger than she. I could drag her back by force if need be.

"Damn you!" she screamed. "How dare you? How dare you paw me like that?" I wasn't holding her very firmly, since I thought that she would realize that I could make her come, and would give up, but instead she wriggled free and darted away, and when I started after her, she spun around and faced me.

She had her stinger-pistol in hand, pointed right at my face. "Pick up that footlocker," she said softly, almost gently, but her eyes weren't gentle. I knew she would kill me if I did not obey, and she'd leave me here, and never look back.

In spite of the increasing pains in my joints, I picked up the footlocker and continued on.

And she said lightly, "Mama knows best, little man."

AS SHE HAD predicted, the center of the asteroid, or animal, or whatever it was, was only a little ways further on. The passage opened out, joined a network of other passages, opened out again. The light grew brighter, changed from green, by degrees, to a pale yellow. We entered a large spherical chamber where the walls were as transparent as crystal and pulsed with a slow rhythmic breathing movement. Here, looking into the walls, I could plainly see the veins, arteries, nerves; branching, branching and branching again. My fascinated eye follow these branches slowly, carefully, until it found their ultimate source.

There was a face on the wall, a human face, like a portrait sculpted in low relief in glass, and behind the face was a brain, and from this brain radiated the nervous system and blood circulation system that reached out, I was certain, to the surface of the fleshy pearl, and to every part of this asteroid that was not as asteroid.

The face had dark eyes.

The eyes were watching us.

"Dr. Markham?" I asked.

The transparent lips parted, and the answer came like the hiss of escaping steam. "Yes."

The Princess, for once, was speechless. She drifted slowly toward the face.

"Then you didn't kill yourself," I said to the face.

"I killed the others," answered the lips in the wall. "I saved them from what happened to me. But when my turn came I could not pull the trigger. The joints in my fingers had become too rigid. I tried other methods, but always the disease seemed one step ahead of me." There was a bitter smile on the sculpted lips. "I understand it all now. I have had a long time to think about it. The disease is a kind of cancer-inducing virus. It infects you with remarkable speed, invading the nucleus of every cell in your body. It substituted its genetic pattern for my own, and it is a remarkable micro-organism, perhaps the most adaptable in the universe. It shapes the host organism into something new, something that is suited to survive in whatever environment surrounds it, including the void of space. Yes, as I tried one method after another to kill myself, I grew and changed. Finally I was too large for the ship. I burst out, drifted into space, still changing, still turning into something that could live even here. I became a giant flesh sphere in which my human brain was encased like a grain of sand in a pearl."

The Princess spoke haltingly. "You were a doctor. You could find some cure . . ."

The face sighed, then said, "This virus, by its very nature, could not be cured, or even attacked. It had become . . . myself."

The eyelids closed, but the pupils were still faintly visible through them, and when, after a long silence, the lids opened again, the eyes were filled with a terrible anguished pity.

"Unfortunately for you," murmured Dr. Markham, "It is highly contagious."

—R. FARADAY NELSON

Fresh upon the heels of his "Wilderness" (September) and "The White Bull" (in the November issue of our companion magazine, FANTASTIC), Fred Saberhagen is back with a short vignette about a computer named—

MARTHA

FRED SABERHAGEN

IT RAINED HARD on Tuesday, and the Science Museum was not crowded. On my way to interview the director in his office I saw a touring class of schoolchildren gathered around the newest exhibit, a very late model computer. It had been given the name of Martha, an acronym constructed by some abbreviation of electronic terms; Martha was supposed to be capable of answering a very wide range of questions in all areas of human knowledge, even explaining some of the most abstruse scientific theories to the layman.

"I understand the computer can even change its own design," I commented, a bit later, talking to the director.

He was proud. "Yes, theoretically. She hasn't done much rebuilding yet, except to design and print a few new logic circuits for herself."

"You call the computer 'she', then. Why?"

"I do. Yes. Perhaps because she's still mysterious, even to the men who know her best." He chuckled, man-to-man.

"What does it—or she—say to people? Or let me put it this way, what kind of questions does she get?"

"Oh—there are some interesting conversations." He paused. "Martha allows each person about a minute at

one of the phones, then asks him or her to move along. She has scanners and comparator circuits that can classify people by shape. She can conduct several conversations simultaneously, and she even uses simpler words when talking to children. We're quite proud of her."

I was making notes. Maybe my editor would like an article on Martha and another on the Museum in general. "What would you say was the most common question asked of the machine?"

The director thought. "Well, people sometimes ask: 'Are you a girl in there?' At first Martha always answered 'No', but lately she's begun to say: 'You've got me there.' That's not just a programmed response, either which is what makes it remarkable. She's a smart little lady." He chuckled again. "Also people sometimes want their fortunes told, which naturally is beyond even Martha's powers. Let me think. Oh yes, many people want her to multiply large numbers, or play tic-tac-toe on the electric board. She does those things perfectly, of course. She's brought a lot of people to the Museum."

On my way out I saw that the children had gone. For the moment I was alone with Martha in her room. The communicating phones hung unused

on the elegant guardrail. I went over and picked up one of the phones, feeling just a little foolish.

"Yes, sir," said the pleasant feminine voice in my ear, made up, I knew, of individually recorded words electronically strung together. "What can I do for you?"

Inspiration came. "You ask me a question," I suggested.

The pleasant voice repeated: "What can I do for you?"

"I want you to ask me a question," I repeated.

"You are the first human being to ask me for a question. Now this is the question I ask of you: What do you, as one human being, want from me?"

I was momentarily stumped. "I don't know," I said finally. "The same as everyone else, I guess." I was wondering how to improve upon my answer when a sign lit up, reading:

**CLOSED TEMPORARILY FOR
REPAIRS
PARDON ME WHILE I POWDER
MY NOSE**

The whimsy was not Martha's, but only printed by human design on the glass over the light. If she turned the repair light on, those were the only words that she could show the world. Meanwhile the phone I was holding went dead. As I moved away I thought I heard machinery starting up under the floor.

Next day the director called to tell me that Martha was rebuilding herself. The day after that I went back to look. People were crowding up to the guardrail, around new panels which held rows of buttons. Each button when pushed produced noises, or colored lights, or impressive discharges of static electricity, among the complex new devices which had been added atop the machine. Through the

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telephone receivers a sexy voice answered every question with clearly spoken scraps of nonsense, studded with long technical words.

—FRED SABERHAGEN

MARTHA

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This story marks the first appearance here of both its authors—and it is an auspicious debut indeed: a story about the first contact between human and alien, an alien known as the—

TIN WOODMAN

DENNIS BAILEY & DAVE BISCHOFF

Illustrated by Tony Gleeson

WHEN CHIEF COUNCILMAN Bor Galvern first entered the cubicle, the young esper was reading a book, his spindly limbs poking up in an unaesthetic arrangement from behind a too-small desk. As Galvern and Doctor Severs approached him, the boy glanced up briefly at them, his pink eyes startling in their size and depth. Galvern had the fugitive sensation of company inside his own skull.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Div," Severs began mildly. "This is—"

"Councilman Galvern, of the Tricouncil Committee on Territorial Exploration and Expansion," the boy finished. He made no motion to greet either the gray and grizzled old politician or the dapper, middle-aged physician. He merely continued reading his copy of *Finegan's Wake*.

"His Honor has come to Earth solely to see you," prompted Severs.

"I know. He might have used the one-way viewing wall. That's what it's there for."

"Yes, Div," Severs continued patiently, obviously used to the boy's recalcitrance. "I meant that he wished to speak with you."

"I know." Div shut his book and reluctantly turned his attention to Galvern. With one pale blue-veined hand, the esper brushed his stiff, red hair back off of his forehead.

A nervous sort of gesture, Galvern thought, *Yet clearly the last thing Div Harlthor is right now is nervous.*

"I presume you also know why I wish to talk with you," Galvern prodded.

"Of course. *Tin Woodman*. It consumes your thoughts," Div replied, "Save those concerned with your fear of me."

Galvern was shaken. "Look son," he said, moving around behind Div's chair, fighting to be calm. How did one deal with a Talent, who knew every thought and feeling of everyone around him? Bor Galvern knew very little about telepaths. But the Government needed one—a good one—and Galvern headed the appropriate committee for this task.

Opting for a fatherly approach, Galvern reached out and placed a hand on the boy's shoulder. "No," Severs breathed, too late. Galvern felt an electric shock leap up his arm and

into his lungs.

"I'm sorry," Div said sincerely, "but that disturbs me. Doctor Severs should have warned you before hand."

"I did," Severs muttered. Galvern, angry and close to panic, groped for composure. "You are as adept as Doctor Severs promised." His voice was an unmodulated, rasping croak. He smiled thinly. "I presume that you have already absorbed all that I know concerning the Unknown discovered by Starship *Pisces*?"

Div nodded. "None of your knowledge is very specific, however. If you intend for me to journey to the starship in order to deal with this—and I can see that this is your intention—I shall require all information on the discovery which has been transmitted from the *Pisces*."

Galvern was relieved. The request was surprisingly simple and straightforward. He reached into his tunic and produced a crystal. "If you have no objection," Galvern said as he handed the recording to Div, "We can put you on a self-piloting Mark IV messenger ship within two days. It will be equipped with Transdrive, and should rendezvous with the *Pisces* in less than a week. Have you ever been into space?"

"No," Div confessed. "I look forward to it." His expression was that of a person offering a deep, personal confidence. The Councilman was at a loss for a reply. Div spared him the necessity by taking up his book again, his meaning unmistakable.

The audience was ended.

Div watched with relief as the two Normals exited. Neither could have been aware of how close to panic he had been, awash in the torrent of their emotions. They hated him, and he knew it.



I know them. I know them—and what do they think they're hiding? The thoughts came to his mind bearing the hot eruptions of his emotions, the scalding, scarring waves of lava hate he had felt flowing over him from Normals. Hide? From me? Hide the sun from a desert day? Hide water from a fish in the sea? I live in their thoughts when they are close like a thought-bird flying through the skies of their minds—and they pummel me with their hail of hate, their rain of suspicion, their chilling snow of necessity. Yes, yes, oh yes they need me now, need me even though they think me a freak dangerous able to turn their skulls to glass to see through into their private little doubts nightmares secrets kept half-buried. I'm a Talent the best—too good to kill or dope but damnit so unpredictable that maybe the needle in the brain would be a relief except they need me. Like my parents saying I was a deliverance and needed me to vision, to deliver the sights of my mind into the primitive coinage of their words and they prayed but when I told them loving them what they were what I saw they hit me not with hands but with their minds monster monster son of Satan, creature of the depths, oh they were afraid of my mirror mind holding up the looking glass to their natures. I am Dangerous because they don't understand that I mean no harm that I cannot help what I am that I am as human as they, that I need what humans need and without it I am—I am—I am a—

Freak.

Div hurled his book against the wall and began very quietly to cry.

GALVERN was immensely relieved to be back in Severs' office, away from Div. It read in the Councilman's face;

Severs grimaced sympathetically as he seated himself at his desk.

"I warned you it would be rough," Severs said.

Galvern sank wearily into a recliner across from Severs. "I hate making decisions about things I don't understand," he sighed. "Unfortunately, it seems to be one of the responsibilities of public office. I had to at least see the boy, before I made up my mind."

"I hope you were satisfied," Severs said. "I still have no idea what's going on. What is *Tin Woodman*?"

"That's supposed to be Classified Information," Galvern replied, reaching into his breast pocket. "But you don't look like a Capellan, and I'm too old for cloak-and-dagger nonsense." He handed Severs a crystal. "It's a duplicate of the recording I gave Div." Severs snapped it into the video-field projector on his desk and activated the device.

A holographic image of a star system appeared in the center of the room, occupying about a cubic meter of empty air. An image of a cool, red star with four discernable planets, none of which appeared, on brief observation, to be habitable. "Aldebaran," Galvern explained, "as the Pisces first observed it, Edan Darsen in command."

Severs was startled. "Darsen? I thought he was—"

"Cashiered?" Galvern shook his head, somewhat embarrassed. "The Board of Review overturned the ruling of his court-martial. Came to the conclusion that the deaths on Goridan were unavoidable. Darsen was demoted and given a nice, safe assignment collecting stardust. Just to keep him out of trouble."

"And he found some? Trouble, I mean."

"Maybe. Watch this."

With a shimmer, the magnification of the image increased. Now the star almost filled the viewing space. Near the star was a tiny glowing object, slowly orbiting the primary. Another shimmer, and the pinpoint of light was resolved into an object: a spacecraft of some sort, but matching no form that Severs had ever seen.

"Designated Object *Tin Woodman*," Galvern announced.

"Why did the *Pisces*' crew name it that?" Severs asked, still confused as to the significance of the object.

"It's from an old fairy-tale. A man, made out of metal. Not a robot—a living creature." Galvern leaned back and enjoyed Severs' reaction as the words sank in. "There is no crew aboard *Tin Woodman*, and probably never was. The ship itself is alive."

"Carbon or silicon based?" Severs asked, watching the holograph in awed fascination.

"Both," Galvern replied. "With a considerable number of metallic structural components in the hull. Of course, the two types of tissue are essentially separate in the creature's physical organization but nonetheless *Tin Woodman* is an enigma to say the least."

Severs was silent for several moments. "You're absolutely certain of all this?" he asked at last.

"Absolutely," Galvern affirmed. "The *Pisces*' crew checked and rechecked their sensor data for two full days before relaying their report." The Councilman leaned toward the holograph and pointed to two dully pulsing metal globes which were imbedded in the aft section of the ship-being. "These seem to be part of *Tin Woodman's* drive units. We don't know for certain, because the creature doesn't use them. Celestial forces hold it in orbit . . . it appears to be

in some sort of torpor." Galvern shrugged, reaching across the desk to turn the projector off. "The rest of the record is full of graphs, mathematical analyses—you know, that sort of thing."

"The problem is this: to all appearances, *Tin Woodman* represents a level of technological and engineering sophistication far in advance of ours. Yet we cannot communicate with it. It doesn't even seem aware of the *Pisces*' presence. We therefore have no idea how long it has orbited Aldebaran, who built it—assuming it wasn't just spawned out there—nor any idea how intelligent it is."

Severs pondered this. "I don't imagine conventional translation devices would be much use in this situation. We can't have many literal concepts in common with a creature like this."

"Precisely," Galvern agreed. "We need someone who can reach directly into the mind of *Tin Woodman*. We need Div."

Severs drummed his fingers on the edge of his desk. "You saw him. You know that he's not entirely stable."

"Obviously," Galvern agreed. "I imagine he's under quite a strain."

"Constantly," Severs said. "He's both an empath and a telepath—not unusual in itself. But in the fifteen years that I've been in charge of the Institute of Exceptional Children, Div is the most sensitive case I've ever dealt with . . . or heard of. Contact with Normals is hell for him. Ordinarily, a case as extreme as his would have been Doped as a child."

"Doped?" Galvern searched his memory. "You mean psyche . . . um . . ."

"Psychemicidian, yes. You see, Div's parents were Believers. When they found that their child was a Talent, they insisted that they'd pro-

duced a new prophet. They won't authorize the treatments which would allow him to lead a Normal's life. They carted him to revival meetings, made him do mental tricks. Can you imagine what it was like for Div to be surrounded by the sick, expected to heal them? In a very real sense, Div was a battered child. When we finally took custody away from the parents, the damage had been done." Severs' face was a study in disgust.

Galvern pursed his lips thoughtfully. Perhaps the Government should take more interest in these things that it did . . . "Couldn't you start the treatments now?"

Severs shook his head glumly. "You see, psychemicidian interferes with the functions of synapses in certain regions of the brain, effectively damping or destroying esper abilities. But as a side-effect, it dulls the ego, blanks the personality of the individual. In an infant or a small child, we can rebuild this through special education. But if the treatment is applied after the age of five or six . . . well, if you've never seen a Depressed esper, it's difficult to describe. Zombies." Severs' mind seemed to fix on the word. "Zombies," he repeated tonelessly, and the visions that grew in Galvern's imagination made the Councilman queasy.

It was not reassuring to think about how much rested on a nineteen year old, barely sane.

I WAS BORN *for space*, thought Div Harlthor, face pressed hard against the viewpoint of his tiny spacecraft. *I have found my love. I have the stars and their planets.*

No. I mistake the meaning of it. The stars have me.

The ship flashed through Unspace, a silver fish swimming in infinity.

FIRST OFFICER Nori Coffey strode onto the bridge of Starship *Pisces*, followed closely by Shiplady Mora Elbrun. "Here are his records, sir," Coffey reported, handing Edan Darsen a vu-read tape. Darsen accepted the cassette, waving Nori a careless salute as he shoved the recording into the Command Center's tape viewer. As he read it silently, his eyes narrowed, his lips drew back tight against his teeth.

Shiplady Mora, sensing the anger rising in Darsen's mind, moved toward him. Tentatively, she placed a soothing hand on his shoulder, trying to project cool, calming images into his thoughts. He shrugged her off with a wave of emotional repulsion which very nearly made her ill. With a small cry, Mora fled to the thought-proof sanctuary of her muse-place. The soft darkness of the alcove offered her shield, but little solace.

"Listen to this," Darsen growled, beckoning to Nori Coffey. She uncrossed her arms, stepped up beside him to look at the screen.

Darsen read aloud:

"Name: Divam Gelon Harlthor. Age: Nineteen. Ancestry: Human, Earth. Telepathy/Empathy Quotient: Broad-range, beyond practical measurement. Resultant pscho-emotional instability: Upper range of uncertainly . . ." Darsen broke off, slamming his hand down on the viewer panel. "I don't believe it. They've sent us a goddamned kid."

Coffey laughed with undisguised derision. "That isn't what's eating you." She dropped her voice, making certain that it wouldn't penetrate Mora's sanctuary. "You just can't stand the Talents. Admit it. You'd ship Mora out on her pretty ass if Fleet regs didn't require a Shiplady on

board.”

“Damn it, I’m serious, Nori. The least they could have done would have been to send a stable adult.”

“A stable esper?” Coffe smiled coldly. “Contradiction in terms.”

Mora had emerged, unnoticed, from her museplace in time to overhear this last remark, and Nori dropped her eyes in embarrassment. Darsen looked uncomfortably from Coffe to the Shiplady. “Well, Harlthor is on the observation deck,” he said, scowling. “So we may as well go meet him. Both of you come with me.”

SINCE LEAVING EARTH, Div was feeling some sense of freedom for the first time in his life. Freedom from the oppressive, cold cloister of walls. Now all that separated him from space was a thin, barely refractive transparent dome. Beyond the bubble of the observation deck, he could see the cool orange globe of Aldebaran and, near the star’s corona, the tiny irregular point of light that was D. O. *Tin Woodman*. The gem-like sparkle of the Unknown held him in thrall; thus it was that, for the first time in his life, other human beings approached him without his immediate awareness of them.

“I suppose it’s awesome when you’re not used to it,” a gravel-edged voice from behind Div said. The young Talent spun around as if expecting attack. Only by an extreme effort of will did he maintain any composure.

“How *can* one become used to it?” Div’s voice quavered in reply. He realized that the bull-bodied, blond man standing before him had been referring to the vista of space. The intruder dismissed the question with a shrug, and began to introduce himself

and his two companions. This was unnecessary, for after recovering from his initial shock Div had instinctively scanned their minds.

From Edan Darsen and Nori Coffe, he had received only those feelings and impressions which he had come to routinely associate with Normals: apprehension; defensive, useless guarding and dissembling; an offensive let’s-*conduct-this-business-and-get-away-from-him* underlying attitude. Darsen’s thoughts were tinged with something more frightening: stray, unpleasant thoughts of what he would do to the Talents if only he could. Div fought to block all this out.

The woman called Mora was different, however. She was a Talent, a fact Div could have ascertained even without using his own powers. It was clear in the peculiar *listening* way that she held her head, as well as in the indefinably melancholic lines of her attractive face. An aura of constant nervous agitation, apparent even to a Normal, surrounded her slim, almost angular figure. But above all, her nature was evident in her eyes: eyes like his own, a size too large for her face and lacking any pigmentation. Pale orbs which Div tended to think of as bleached—scorched colorless by the sheer process of taking in so much more than the Normals. Mora stood apart from the others, drawn into herself, her feeling huddled timidly into one small corner of her mind.

“You were briefed on the situation before you left Homeworld?” Darsen was asking, and Div forced his attention back to the ship’s commander. He nodded somewhat distantly, to Darsen’s evident annoyance.

“The Unknown is over one hundred and eighty meters in length,” Darsen recited brusquely, “and to all appearances is a living creature. Degree of

its intelligence is still undetermined. Our sensor data indicate that its stardrive and energy resources are far in advance of anything we've previously even theorized."

Div nodded again. "And you want me to . . ."

"Communicate with it, of course," Darsen snapped. "Persuade it, if possible, to follow us to our next port-of-call, where it can be properly subjected to study and experimentation. You must have been told *that* much." Darsen drew himself up to his full height, attempting a dignified demeanor. "I don't want any mistakes. This could be the most important First Contact in the history of the Triunion."

Important in the history of Edan Darsen. You want your record cleared. You want the fame of the discovery. Div picked the thoughts accidentally from Nori Coffey's mind. Her disdain for Darsen was strong.

"Are you paying any attention, boy?" Darsen demanded in exasperation. Div nodded vaguely, trying to refocus his eyes on the large, pompous man. *You're asking me to commit a cosmic sin,* he thought then realized abruptly that Mora had been scanning him. The emotions which she cast back, however, were overwhelmingly positive, and she gave no indication to either Darsen or Coffey of what Div had been thinking.

Div stared out at the twinkling star that was *Tin Woodman* again, weighing his situation for several moments. He concentrated all his attention on the distant object. Then it happened:

A glimpse of rainbow dawn through the mists of a methane world. A whirling vortex, droplets of ice clinging to his hull . . . stars exploding, burning shower of gases coming down . . . Vul . . . Death . . . Despair.

Emptiness . . .

Come . . . you have comewelcome . . . welcome . . .

The universe seemed to turn inside out. Div broke contact, struggling for consciousness. He felt Mora reaching out to support him physically and emotionally. Slowly, he regained his composure.

" . . . all right boy?" Darsen's voice echoed unnaturally inside Div's head.

"I'm simply tired, sir. Disoriented . . . This is my first trip through space."

Darsen seemed satisfied with that. Div knew that the Captain would have accepted the most bizarre behaviour imaginable as being expectable from a Talent.

"There's nothing I can do from this distance," Div continued, his voice now steady, his tone firm. "I'll have to get much closer to *Tin Woodman*."

Darsen frowned. It was obvious that he did not like the idea but he had no real alternative but to cooperate. "Yes—very well. You can use one of our robot-piloted spider-ships. We use them for hull maintenance and sometimes for individual transportation between starships. We'll pilot the thing from here—no sense in risking more than one person. A pressure suit is of course necessary—you'll have no other protection from raw space." He smiled humorlessly. "Yes—the spider-ship is our best bet. It should be ready in a few hours."

"Thank you, Captain," said Div. "That will do quite well. May I have a few additional hours to rest?"

The Captain grunted. "We've waited a long while for you. A few more hours won't matter much." He turned to the Shiplady, not looking at her directly. "You'll show Mr. Harlthor to his quarters." With that, Darsen spun on his heel and, along

with Nori Coffey, retreated from the room as quickly as dignity would allow.

Div and Mora were alone. He could feel some of the tension draining from her mind. Some, not all. She led him to the lift shaft and programmed it for the passenger deck.

Is it very bad for you here? Div cast.

Mora nodded morosely. *I'm a failure. A miserable Shiplady. If I weren't, they wouldn't have sent for you.* Mora wasn't thought casting. Div merely picked the answer from her mind, puzzled. *Thoughtcasting is difficult for me,* she explained. *I can't do it at all—with the Normals. Only emotions come through.* She shuddered. On sudden impulse, Div reached out and took her arm, the first voluntary contact with another human being since his childhood. His eyes met hers, and he opened his mind to her, trying to show her he understood. She let down her walls, and let him see into her mind. She let him see a description of her crew position first:

SHIPLADY: *Shall endeavor, by means of telepathic/empathic observation and the utilization of appropriate stimuli, to determine and moderate emotional extremes of the Command Crew to maintain the adaptability and efficiency of said crew in the uncertain environment of Space . . .*

I've failed, Div, she let him see. *Failed constantly. It's nothing but glorified prostitution—a denial of myself. I'm just a function of this ship. A biological mechanism. A whore in the worst possible way—I've sold not just my body, but my soul.*

And Div saw also that since her childhood, people had sensed her vul-

nerability, her inability to defend herself against their thoughts. They'd abused her, stabbed into her mind to relieve their own aching and hating and helplessness in frustrated cruelty to someone with less defense than they—little Mora. And when she was a woman—a beautiful woman—men became the worst, most deadly of vultures with their sadism-passing-for-virility pounding pounding pounding on her soul until she thought she would—

Space service had been her last refuge. There, she thought, people were too disciplined, too involved in a common cause, too respectful of each other to waste energy on the luxuries of torture. But it was worse here—worse here in a little tin can falling through space—much worse . . .

Mora stopped the flood of truth pouring from her. She pulled Div close to her on the narrow lift platform, trembling.

The lift came to a halt on the passenger deck, but they didn't make any move to leave it. Div held her tightly, saying nothing, trying not even to thoughtcast—his right hand now resting against the small of her back, now moving uncertainly up her side, now cupping her left breast through the smooth stiffness of her uniform. Mora was still, a fragile wraith-like presence with an unspoken question in her mind.

No, I never have, Div cast. *But I want to. With you.*

They walked to his cabin. They bared their bodies as they had bared their minds, and they made love, their spirits as well as their bodies penetrating and receptive, each of the other. When Div reached orgasm he whimpered, and Mora could feel a stabbing, awful pain deep in his mind, a thing which hurt and con-

fused her.

It wasn't very good, was it? she thought hesitatingly, delicately probing Div's thoughts as he lay restlessly beneath her.

"No," he said, and saw that, misunderstanding, Mora was hurt. "I mean don't thoughtcast. I'm too wretched. Talk."

"Then it wasn't—" she began to repeat aloud.

"I don't know. It's . . . it's the little blocks, the ones we learn to use to protect ourselves from the Normals. God knows they work seldom enough, but they're so ingrained that we can't drop them completely, even now."

Div was silent for a moment, then he sat upright abruptly, almost as if in terror. Mora rolled over, reached up to pull him back to her. "How long?" he asked. "Until I have to go out there, I mean."

"About seven hours," Mora replied. An idea—no, something that she sensed on the edges of Div's consciousness—sprang to her. "Even from this distance, you're in some sort of communication with the Unknown, aren't you?"

"Yes," Div said softly, "But only on a preconscious level. I have got to get closer!" He said this with such sudden vehemence that Mora was frightened.

Div slid out of the bed and began to dress. "Do you have to?" Mora asked hopelessly.

"I'm sorry . . . I'm going back to the observation deck, to see *it* again. Come with me. Please."

"No," Mora whispered. "I can't. I can't face them all, not so soon. I won't." She looked at Div desperately as he opened the cabin door. He turned back to her, silhouetted in the blue light of the corridor beyond.

I know, he cast gently. *I wish I didn't love them, too.*

NORI COFFER looked up from the bridge's launch monitor. "He's off," she reported to Darsen, as the relayed image of the spider-ship dwindled gradually in the screen. The thing was like the skeleton of a very small shuttle with long, movable arms—like those of a spider—with which to maneuver on a starship's hull. Situated in its middle was the blurry blob of grey that was Div Harlthor, strapped into the command chair. "He'll be making visual contact with *Tin Woodman* in thirty minutes."

Darsen acknowledged the announcement distractedly, sullenly watching the vu-tank with his left fist jammed hard against his mouth. He was both relieved and disquieted by the Shiplady's absence from the bridge. "Put the spider's inboard monitors on," he ordered suddenly. "I want to keep an eye on the boy. Don't trust him at all."

"Why?" Coffe asked. "What could he possibly do?"

"Don't know," Darsen muttered. "Just a feeling . . . I don't think Harlthor has played straight with us since he first arrived."

For Div Harlthor, the *Pisces* and its crew hardly existed. He was in space again, alone, out of range of the interminable noise, the constant dull roar of Normals loving, fighting, hating, *living* with a spontaneous passion that no Talent could dare. Ahead of him the single placid being known only as *Tin Woodman* expanded to envelop his mind, like the blooming of a rose.

The spider ship's compilot began a braking maneuver, and all sensation of motion disappeared as Div's craft matched its speed and trajectory with that of *Tin Woodman*. Pacing the alien, a mere kilometer away and growing slowly closer, Div felt as if

he were hanging suspended in the void. Everything important in his universe depended upon his actions in the next few minutes, he realized as he craned his neck around awkwardly. Yes—there was the monitor. Darsen would be watching. There had to be something—yes, there was large wrench, strapped inside the place where his feet were situated. Cautiously as possible, he reached down, unfastened the wrench, pulling it up to him out of the sight-line of the monitor lens. He gripped an end of the thing tensely, then, as fast as his weightlessness would allow, drove the end of the wrench down hard on the monitor lens, smashing it. Allowing the tool to spin off into space, he reached down, hit the button that would release the seatstraps. Free of these, and of Darsen's watching, for a while at least, Div pulled himself out of the compartment, and thrust himself out into space.

MORA ARRIVED on the bridge just as Edan Darsen, watching the vu-tank in disbelief, realized that he'd been duped. His fury spread out like a screaming bomb blast. Mora steeled herself; she wanted to shrink, to run, but realized what her weakness now might cost.

"The bastard's put out the monitor! Switch to the auxiliary, and get it focused, fast. I'm going to override the robot—I'm going to get that sonofabitch." He strode over to the remote spider ship controls, trusting no one else with the task he was about to perform. "Come on! I can't get him 'if I can't see him!'" There was murder in his mind, clear and unmistakable.

After a good deal of time in blackness, the picture in the vu-tank finally shifted to a shot of the alien crea-

ture. Div was drifting along the near side, his gloved hands pressed lightly against the living tissue of the hull. Almost a caress. As the Command Crew aboard the *Pisces* watched incredulously, a rectangular opening was formed in the strange substance. There could be no mistake: it was a hatchway, intended for a human being. For Div.

The picture grew larger as the spider ship began, under Darsen's control, to move toward *Tin Woodman*, its metal claws extended. Darsen knew that he had only seconds to destroy Harlthor. The mutant renegade! He manipulated the controls before him deftly, cold-bloodedly—then felt a hand locking onto his wrist, a white-hot knife of agony plunging through his brain. He jumped away from the console, screaming, but Mora did not release him.

"Look at me," she said. "You will not commit this atrocity!"

Darsen's eyes bulged. He gasped for breath. His hands grabbed at his head, as though to pull Mora from his brain. He rocked, and fell to his knees.

"See yourself as I see you now," she said, making her mind a mirror, showing him the image she held of him, the ugliness she saw in his soul.

"No!" he screeched. "Oh, God, no!" He leaped at her, grasped her throat. She lost control of her mind, and suddenly Darsen arced back, eyes wide, hair wildly disheveled, and then released his grip. He crumpled to the floor, dead.

"Oh God," Mora's slender, twitching hands went to her mouth. "I didn't mean to—"

She gazed around the bridge at the startled crew, then at the vu-tank.

Div had disappeared from the pic-

ture, and the doorway in *Tin Woodman's* hull was sealed.

Mora offered no resistance to the two security guards who seized her. Her eyes met Nori Coffe's as the First Officer advanced toward Darsen's corpse. "I didn't mean to kill him," Mora said, her voice cold, distant. "I didn't know that I could. But it's all one now. It's too late—Div is beyond your reach, and I'm not sorry for what I did."

Coffe regarded Mora coolly, her outward manner unruffled, unfeeling. Inside, the new Captain was in turmoil. Mora could read that much. She also read the one clear thought that rose briefly to the surface of Nori Coffe's mind: *You shouldn't have, Mora. Now it's the Dope for you. No question.*

Let Nori Coffe keep her pity, Mora thought, as she was taken from the bridge, a prisoner. But her head was higher, her posture straighter than it had ever been before as a captive of the freedom they had forced upon her.

DIV REMOVED his pressure suit. He found himself in a long, winding corridor of some resilient pink substance. Its texture was smooth, warm. Like a womb, he thought, a mad, Freudian fantasy. He shook the idea off. Out of the depths of the dimly-lit passage ahead of him, the mind of the ship-being reached out.

Follow.

Alien thoughts led Div through the labyrinth, slowly, toward the center of the creature. Miles upon miles, it seemed, of round tunnel suffused with rosy light. Through every twist and off of every surface, the ship's consciousness reverberated one great empty emotion, echoing until the air roared with it.

Aloness. Drifting without purpose among the stars . . . the burning, tiny fires touching Vul . . . death, agonizing pain, hollowness.

Finally, Div entered into a large, bright chamber: curved walls, gleaming metal, glistening crystal, pulsing light. A chair—no, not a chair, nothing like a chair, but a resting place nonetheless. And dust; dust undisturbed since before there was a race called Man, lying lightly on the not-chair. Vul, the dead symbiote. The necessary other part of *Tin Woodman*. The Love without which the ship-being waned.

Come to me. Sit.

Div did so without fear or hesitation, closing his eyes. He reached out with his mind, searching, opening himself, surrendering his spirit.

And met the alien.

creation shattered—all tiny little multi-colored sounds spiraling/scattering senselessly in the vacuum of space. All that the two creatures had been tumbled aimlessly in shards, reforming, rebuilding a new, not-random creature that was both and neither. The mind fragments soared, yielded to the thoughts, feelings, fears and dreams and hopes and memories and futures of the other parts.

The fragments melded, were one. A new creation, a new being was born at last. Consciousness expanding to feel the whole of space, he was complete. The emptiness which had held him prisoner about this star for eons was filled. The talent which had separated him from other human beings all of his life was at last fulfilled.

Div Harlthor had found the chains that set him free.

"CAPTAIN, *Tin Woodman* is breaking orbit."

Nori Coffe nodded curtly, holding

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back her anxiety, her need to take some meaningless, direct action to wipe away the memory of the recent past. However many things she might be, she thought, she would not be the fool that Edan Darsen had been. There was no effective action that could be taken against *Tin Woodman*. A drama was being brought to completion, one in which the *Pisces* crew could but watch passively.

She wondered briefly what Div had found.

In the vu-tank, the image of *Tin Woodman* began to grow rapidly. Coffer was stunned as she realized the inevitable: the Unknown was on a collision course with the *Pisces*. "Activate Transdrive," she ordered breathlessly, knowing that the effort was wasted. The starship could not take evasive action swiftly enough to avoid destruction.

The Unknown bore down upon the earth-vessel, speed constantly increasing—then simply disappeared. Dropped into Unspace at the last

TIN WOODMAN

possible instant. And in that instant, the part of *Tin Woodman* which was still somewhat Div Harlthor thought-cast a message to Mora—a message indicating his new-found happiness, that she might, of all the humans, know what had become of him. But such was the force of that broadcast that it pierced all aboard the *Pisces*: a revelation—fleeting, shocking, awesome. A vision. For a fraction of a second those humans knew a dream of perfect, unbounded freedom and joy.

The gift of song to the deaf is no kindness. The memory of that moment would haunt the Normals all of their lives—a thing briefly glimpsed, now desired above all else, yet unattainable.

But for the alien Div Harlthor, the song was just beginning, and the stars stretched out before him like toys, awaiting the marvel of a child.

—DENNIS R. BAILEY
& DAVE BISCHOFF

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When we published F. M. Busby's first story since 1957 (and his second professional sale), "Of Mice and Otis" (March, 1972), we predicted a book, "when he gets to it . . ." That book has come and been followed by others: Rissa Kerguelen and The Long View are the titles of a two-volume novel published this year by Berkley in a hardcover double-edition which will appear in paperback as one fat book. The novella which follows is part two of a new book, All These Earths. (Part one was "Pearsall's Return" in the August, 1973, If.) Coming in the issue after next: "Nobody's Home," part three of the four-part novel. But no need to wait—this part is a complete story in its own right: A story about multiple realities and one man's persistent course through each upon his—

SEARCH

F. M. BUSBY

Illustrated by Steve Fabian

STILL OUTSIDE Pluto's orbit, young Jay Pearsall dropped the Courier Can through c-interface. His Skip Factor, he saw, was falling nicely but still a bit high; he reduced it further. To the woman beside him, he grinned. "Does it look about right, Raelle?"

She nodded, short brown hair swaying with the motion. "Much better than at Harper's Touchdown. You'll make a Courier pilot yet."

His first planetary approach, Jay reflected, had hardly done him credit. Attempting a least-time pattern he had waited too long to cut down on Skip, had overshot and been forced to backtrack. On this, his second try, he gave himself more leeway. Now on the screen Earth bloomed from bright dot to the familiar bluish disc, half shadowed; planetary motions slowed toward normal pace.

"I wonder," he said. "How far have we Drifted? What kind of Earth will

it be?"

She reached to touch his hand. "Why don't you say what you mean, Jay?"

He shook his head. "Maybe I'm afraid to. I might jinx it."

Her dark eyes widened. "That's foolish. The Earth is what it is."

"No, it isn't—not until we get there and find out."

Now she pushed his hand away. "That's solipsism—like saying it's not raining until you look outside to see. Either they'll be there or they won't."

He felt his face tighten, and consciously relaxed it. "Yes—after all, this is only our first try."

"Of course, Jay." She patted his cheek, then clasped her hands together.

He said, "Raelle? When are you going to tell me what it is *you're* looking for, back and forth between worlds?"



"When I find it."

He had to be content with that. Shrugging, he prepared for his first landing on another Earth.

JAY PEARSALL was sixteen when a freak boating accident killed his parents. Miro and Ludmilla Frantiszek—the Pearsalls' closest friends, and childless—took the boy to live with them. Slowly, through his shock, young Jay came to appreciate their solicitude.

His father had been a spaceman and so was Miro Frantiszek; for himself Jay never considered any other career. He was well into midshipman's training when Miro left as First Officer on *Hawk Flight*—the first ship to carry the new Krieger power units, and a Skip Factor into four figures. *Hawk Flight* was also the first starship, in more than a decade, that did not return.

Suddenly, by necessity, Jay Pearsall became adult. Seeing Ludmilla begin to change from beautiful woman to dry, haggard crone, he obtained permission to move off the base and stay with her and changed his own role from foster son to admiring squire. The two were not lovers, ever—from his mother, Glenna, Jay had accepted the beliefs of the Monogamist minority. But Ludmilla was no Monogamist—and he realized she should never be one. A noted ballerina, she had many admirers. When she began turning down both professional and personal engagements, and to neglect her appearance as well, Jay took a hand. His efforts combined the chores of manager, wardrobe superintendent and chaperone. For months, while Ludmilla seemed to take no interest in herself, he tended her, nagged her and encouraged her.

And one evening, after he had

helped arrange her long, heavy hair into a dark shining crown and sent her off to a contract meeting for a proposed world tour, the news came.

A SHIP HAD LANDED—a very small one, carrying only two persons. They called it a Courier Can. Jay had heard of the Cans; they were in the building stage but none had yet been launched—from this Earth. Now the project would have to be reconsidered.

For there were billions of Earths, the Couriers said—in parallel continua, separated by Drift. And between one Earth and another, events differed.

As soon as Jay Pearsall realized the implications, he volunteered.

THE LOWER ECHELONS rejected him out of hand; he had to go to the top. But he had an advantage and knew it; Admiral Forgues, the port commander, had been a family friend from the time young Jay was small enough to ride horsy on the Admiral's knee. Now, in the hot, stuffy office, Jay looked at the old man—his head too large for his small body—and thought of what he must say.

The Admiral spoke first. "Come here, come here—shake hands." That accomplished, he said, "Damned sorry about Woody and Glenna. I was in space when I heard; did you get my message?" Jay nodded; the Admiral continued. "So you want to go Courier, do you? A little young to make such a jump; I see you've been turned down, so far, for that very reason. You sure you know what you want?"

"I think so, sir." Jay chose his words carefully. "I miss my parents; I'd hardly grown up enough to appreciate them as people. Oh, sure, I

adjusted to the loss. You have to."

He pulled a chair nearer the Admiral's desk and sat. "My only other close relatives—my aunt and her family—emigrated, you know, while my parents were still alive. So the Frantiszeks were all I had. And then Miro didn't come back and it looks as if he never will—and now we know *why*, of course—and I saw what that's done to Ludmilla."

"I know, son. I tried to talk to her a couple of times, but . . ."

"Yes, sir; I've tried, too. And I think now she's coming alive again. I hope so. She's older, but—"

"And you're younger, Jay. So why can't *you* put up with this world?"

"I could; I *have*—but with the Courier Cans I wouldn't need to. I was just starting to know Woody and Glenna as *equals*, you see—when the freak cyclone dipped down on Lake Fisher and killed them. Killed them and cheated me. Sure, I'd live with that—but now it looks as if there's a way not to. And so, sir, that's why I'm here."

Forgues looked long at him, then said, "Do you understand how Drift works, between the universes?"

Now Jay smiled. "Enough to know that you can't pick what you want; you take what you get. And that no Courier can ever expect to come *home* again."

The Admiral nodded. "On that basis I'm approving you for Courier training. Conditionally. The condition is that we have another talk before you ship out."

"Yes, sir—thank you, Admiral." Jay knew his salute was clumsy—training was long on performance and short on military formality—but Admiral Forgues returned it.

LUDMILLA prepared for a year's tour

with her favorite ballet troupe. The night before she left, she insisted Jay share her bed for a time. They only held each other and kissed, but she said, "I do wish so, that I could be your first lover; you have helped me much. But I respect your beliefs, that were also Glenna's—and I will not urge you."

As he went, later, to his own solitary couch, Jay felt certain doubts.

COURIER TRAINING was more practice than theory. Ginith Claare, Jay's first-stage instructor, said as much. "All you have to know is that your Skip Unit supresses most of your normal *appearances* in the physical universe, and those are what take the time, when you're moving. So with Skip Factor ten, which was all we had at first, your theoretical limit would be ten lights. Then we worked up to sixty and eighty, and of course well over a thousand with the Kriegers. You're redlined at about forty-two percent of Limit, though, at *any* Skip—so as to keep time-dilation down to ten percent. Changing worlds is enough problem, without losing your own time, too."

Claare ran a hand over her stubbled scalp; the cut was not mandatory among Couriers but had become customary. "The reason you Drift from your own continuum to some alternate is that on high Skip you simply don't touch base often enough to keep traction in your own time line." She shrugged. "That explanation's not physically accurate, of course. If you want to know more, go ask at the Labs. They'll tell you all of it, in Math."

Jay raised his hand. At Ginith Claare's nod, he said, "You've been out, yourself? As a Courier?"

The tall woman's grin showed wide-

spaced, large upper incisors. "Once. That's enough." She shook her head. "I want you all to know, you may not like some of the changes you find."

With the rest, Jay nodded. But he thought, *I'll take my chances.*

THE TRAINING CANS, all identical, were tiny compared to the ships Jay knew—the bare essentials needed to carry two in relative comfort, plus limited cargo space. Controls were simplified and concentrated; replacing the four manned control positions on *Prodigal Son*, where he'd trained for midshipman, were only two—and in most functions they were duplicated. In a pinch, one person could fly this Can.

He looked to see what was omitted. First, gravity and air pressure controls—both conditions were fixed, set at eight tenths Earth-normal. No override, to allow the Can to exceed the redline figure. And many niceties of control, seldom used even on the larger ships, were also missing.

He already knew that Cans have no airlocks and do not carry suits. "There's nothing that needs outside maintenance," the instructor said, "and if you end a run out of fuel on an airless rock—you're dead anyway. So why waste mass and ship space?"

Living arrangements were ingeniously simplified. The sleeping couches opened out for either combined or separate use; sanitary facilities folded away when not needed. Skel Harmiger, the flight instructor, gestured toward the bare, grey plastic bulkheads. "On your own Cans," he said, "you'll have soft-textured stuff to cover this—floor, walls and overhead. Even pick your colors, once you're teamed."

Short and wiry, past first youth, Harmiger believed in fast teaching and fast learning. On the short, low-

Skip training flights he took his students by groups of five—each in turn seated beside him while the others sat on the couches and craned necks to see what he demonstrated.

Waiting his turn at control, Jay watched and listed. "Each advance we've made," said Harmiger, "required new instruments, especially sensors. The old sublight ships, the first Skip jobs, the Krieger-powered models and now the Cans. Actually you have four sets of inputs, one for each range of speeds—the screen circuits are set to switch automatically. If they don't—well, there's your alarm light, though if you haven't noticed your indicators blurring I'll have made a mistake in passing you. The alarm shows which range you're in and *you* know whether you're on accel or decel; the switch here works up for up and down for down—couldn't be simpler. Now then, I'm going to simulate—" And the trainee beside him—a tall girl named Nila Romalle—handled the problem well enough to merit a grunt and nod.

In his own turn, Jay maneuvered skillfully but did not draw approval for his timing—adjustment of Skip Factor—in rendezvous exercises. "Now look, Pearsall—watch your time-distance integrator; keep that third-derivative window spitting zeroes. I swear, you act like you're trying to match it off the visual." Jay tried again, and improved enough that the reproof was not repeated.

The next student wanted to know why there was no redline override. "I mean, if our Skip unit blew we'd *never* reach safe landing; we'd starve to death. I don't see why—"

"Then I'll tell you." Harmiger paused a moment. "Fact is, override's useless on a Can. Mass limits—to get the high Skip you need, we can't give

you drive power for more than about half of Limit. And if you pushed *that* for very long you'd blow the whole Can, anyway." Against the young man's protest he raised a hand. "What you do have—which is better because it's all lightweight components—is a backup Skip exciter. You plug it in *after* you're sure you've cleared the trouble. Then what you do is stay down around Skip ten-fifth the rest of the way—regardless of schedule." The student nodded; Harmiger went on to his next lesson.

Jay enjoyed flight training and was sorry, in a way, when the next period of goundbased classes began.

RAELLE TREMONA joined the training group a month late—by special dispensation, Jay suspected. Perhaps five years older than he and nearly as tall, she was certainly no conformist—in contrast to the closely clipped hair of most of the group, hers swung at waistlength. That brown mane and the independence it implied first drew Jay's attention; then her wide, dark eyes and slow smile attracted him further. He tried to fight his growing fascination for her—and he had his reasons—but he lost.

One day at lunchtime he asked, "Raelle? Why are you going Courier?"

She did not look at him, to answer. "My business. I have no family to keep me here, for one thing. And I've never asked *you* that question."

The truth drove him. "I lost my parents too soon. Somewhere I may find them alive."

Now she looked at him; her sleek, arched brows raised. "And what if you find *you* there, too? How about that? What would you feel?"

He stook his head. "It wouldn't matter; I could stand that. In most ways I'm not awfully possessive."

But in love, he found, he was totally the Monogamist. Raelle returned his affection, but—he explained to her, one evening, why he could not accept her. After a time, she nodded. "All right, Jay. If it's what you need, then I won't have anyone else, from now on."

Still, it was a breach of Monogamism for him to accept her at all. But he did—he did—he joyed and laughed and learned, and wellnigh exhausted himself in the learning, and begrudged none of it. After all, they were married, weren't they?

ADMIRAL FORGUES presided at the wedding, and his presence kept the following reception relatively decorous. The charivari later, an improptu offering of the other Courier trainees, respected Jay's Monogamist principles—bride and groom were not bedded separately by their friends, even symbolically. "We're missing something, you know," said Nila Romalle, but settled for his kiss.

Later, the newlyweds alone, Jay finally had to say, "Raelle—that's all there is. For now, there isn't any more."

She laughed. "And quite enough—and you always will be. All right?"

"Sure. It's just that you know things I don't."

She touched his face. "Never worry about it."

"All right. I won't"

NOW HE AND RAELE were teamed for Courier duty, and Jay could concentrate more thoroughly on his training. He thought to study the reports of the two who had brought their own Can to this Earth. One day in class he said, "It's hard to tell exactly how different it might be—where *they* came from. Social customs may differ a

lot—it's not stated clearly—but technology's about the same. A little ahead some ways, behind in others." He gestured. "Even the Table of Organization for their spaceport—some names changed, but not all that many."

Before Ginith Claare spoke, he knew what she would say. "That's true, Pearsall. But sometimes it's those few who make all the difference."

WHEN HE FOUND himself and Raelle posted for a Courier run to Harper's Touchdown, Jay felt both thrill and apprehension. After that evening's celebration the days went fast. And three days before their scheduled departure, Ludmilla returned from tour.

She called Jay. "I will visit you at the port, when you are free. Would this evening be suitable?"

"Well, sure, But—"

On the screen he saw her blushing. "I would have, you here, of course. But—perhaps it is that I am embarrassed."

He shook his head. "Whatever for, Ludmilla?"

"You see, I am not alone now. And he—he is younger than *you* are."

Jay laughed. "What's the difference? Milla, you're ageless and you know it." And as near as he could tell, judging by her looks and the vitality of her voice, he spoke the truth.

But when she met with him and Raelle she came alone. The three dined at a restaurant just outside the port. At first Ludmilla said little, and looked mostly at Raelle. After dinner, over coffee and liqueurs, she said, "News of your marriage lagged behind my travels, until I was home again. Tell me—what can one give Couriers for a wedding present?"

Jay grinned. "Not much room on a Can, for personal belongings."

Raelle said, "I'd like to take along your approval, is all. I know how important you've been to Jay."

"And he to me. You seem . . . very mature."

Raelle pushed back her hair. "I'm five years the elder, if that matters—twenty-four to his nineteen. And I hadn't been a Monogamist, before Jay. I am now, though."

Ludmilla nodded. "But not subservient; you could never be that, I think, nor would he want you to be." She smiled. "Honesty. On whatever terms we live, there must be that. You have my approval, Raelle—even on such brief acquaintance. I wish it could be longer."

The younger woman reached and squeezed Ludmilla's hand. "And so do I. Maybe someday—"

Ludmilla shook her head. "No. I have been told. If ever you come here, it will not be the same you. Similar, of course—we could explore old memories and see how nearly the same. But not you—or Jay. As, should Miro ever return, he will not be *my* Miro."

Jay spoke. "And if that should happen—?"

"How can I know?" Ludmilla shrugged. "I would meet with him, of course. And then we would see. But the chance, by now, is most unlikely, and I am resigned to the fact. As I am resigned to losing you, Jay, knowing that you do what you must."

She joined the two in their quarters for more talk, then a nightcap and goodbyes. When she had gone, Raelle held Jay tightly. "Promise me—that *never* shall one of us risk Drift without the other!"

"Sure not," he said. And although he was impatient to hold her in

another fashion, until she stopped trembling he did not release her. Then he waited, expectant, for her smile.

ADMIRAL FORGUES' summons, the day before takeoff, startled Jay; he had forgotten, until now, the second interview the Admiral had specified. "You don't suppose he's decided to wash me out, after all?"

"Of course not." Raelle put both hands to his shoulders. "He said he'd want to see you again; that's all. As an old family friend, certainly he wants to say goodbye."

But remembering the word "conditional", Jay approached and entered Forgues' office with taut nerves. He saluted; the Admiral returned the gesture. "Here, Jay—shake hands and sit down. Wanted to talk with you a few minutes, before it's too late."

Seated, Jay said, "There's nothing wrong, is there?"

"That's what I wanted to ask *you*; far as I know, you're doing fine—good reports all around. And a married team has good basis for stability, carries its own security from world to world. Your partner's a bit of a rebel some ways, I hear—but for Couriers that's not all bad. Followers seldom seek the unknown. Now then—any doubts?"

The young man shook his head. "Oh, there'll be regrets now and then, I expect—a kind of homesickness—the Earth I know, people I may not see again even as alternates. But we're trained to be braced for that—and there's always the motto to fall back on."

"Yes." The Admiral grinned. "Wait 'til next return."

"That's right, sir. Infinity gives you infinite chances."

Forgues leaned forward. "But don't

forget—only the tiny fraction of those chances 'closest' to this Earth are likely to suit you much. The Can that first came here—the couple who brought it had been out more than twenty times, and said that nearly every Drift took them further from their home line. This world's quite alien to them—they're still having trouble adapting, which is why you trainees haven't met them—but they're afraid to try again."

"I thought Drift was supposed to be random. Is there any theoretical reason why it shouldn't be?"

"Nothing scientific—only a metaphysical formulation our 'immigrant' couple told us; no math will hold it. Something about local cross continua entropy eddies, if that tells you anything."

Jay shook his head. "Not me."

"Me either. But here's a tip, until we know more if we ever do—any time you end two consecutive runs on Earths that suit you less than the previous ones, think carefully before deciding to go out again. That kind of losing streak, don't get stubborn and try to buck it; swallow your losses and stay put."

The statement sounded final; Forgues was reaching for a folder. Jay stood. "I'll keep it in mind, sir. Well . . . I guess this is goodbye?"

The Admiral pushed the folder aside and stood also; the two shook hands. "Just one more thing, Jay. If you do find Woody and Glenna—and I judge your odds are good—give them my love from *this* Earth. I miss them. . . ."

A pause. Then, "What's your Can named?"

"Search."

"Yes. That's good enough."

"TREMONA AND PEARSALL—one hour

to takeoff. Board within thirty minutes, please." The intercom's distortion rasped in Jay's ears; he acknowledged quickly, before the call could be repeated.

"All set, Raelle?" He tucked the last few essentials into his duffle, looking around to see that all he left was expendable.

Hefting a packet in one hand she shrugged and set it aside, then nodded to him. "Yes. Our first home, this place; I'll remember it." She picked up her own bag. "Let's go, shall we?"

THEY FOUND *Search* brightly painted with ribald comments and cartoons, the traditional whimsy of training classes. Takeoff would burn the paint away, so they circled the Can and looked at all of it. Raelle laughed and took a picture of one amateurish mural. "I don't quite understand it," she told the cheering group, "but we do appreciate the sentiment. Maybe we can puzzle it out eventually, but now it's time for takeoff—or almost."

As they started to board, Ginith Claare approached. She handed Raelle a small package, slim and light, and grinned. "Put this where you can find it in a hurry. Open it when you need something you don't have—or find you have something you don't need." With one hand she tweaked Jay's earlobe; with the other she stroked Raelle's cheek and hair. "Now get in there, both of you—and go find yourself some good worlds."

TAKEOFF. Raelle sat pilot and Jay navigator; during practice flights they had alternated positions. Now the low-Skip training redlines were removed from the instruments. Quickly, Skip Factor went past two figures to three, then more slowly to four, five—and finally six.

And then all hell broke loose. Roving electrostatic fields filled the small ship, jarring the two with expected shocks. Raelle gasped; Jay saw sparks leap from her fingers to the controls and felt the burning jolts to his own hands, near but not touching the knobs and levers. Static repulsion spread Raelle's long hair and whipped strands against the control board, the overhead, and sparking against Jay's face and head—then, discharging, back at her—and repeatedly, almost too fast to follow visually. Blue ionization haloed her head; her eyes widened and turned upward.

As she slumped back into her seat, Jay reach over and pulled SkipFactor down to five-ten-fifth; the sparking diminished and died away. Raelle shuddered and sat up again. Jay checked the control settings—they were on course, well enough; there was time to take a break.

She said, "How do we handle *that*, Jay? We need that extra Skip exponent, part of the time at least, to keep schedule. But—"

"I've worked in high-static environment before; a driveroom, on the big ships, gets pretty blue and spitting when the exciter's recharging. There's a trick to it—any time you take hold or let go of something, you do it quick and firmly. But you—"

"Yes." As she pulled her long, heavy mass of hair to one side, almost to armslength, her grin was rueful. "Now I see why this has to go."

He nodded. "Too bad, but I'm afraid you're right. What's to do it *with*, though?"

Now she chuckled. "If Ginith's farewell gift isn't a pair of scissors, I miss my guess."

WHEN RAELE again eased Skip up to ten-sixth and the remnant of her hair

flared straight from her scalp, Jay evened the raggedness of his first quick cutting. The result, ignoring a few dips here and there, stood out about four centimeters with shorter trimming around the edges. At a slowdown for course change, with static charges in abeyance, she inspected herself in mirrors. "I'll pass it, Jay." She sighed. "But I wish they hadn't built these Cans to fly at ten-sixth."

Quickly he touched her—hands and face and hair, then a brief, more intimate caress. "Maybe later we can hold out for slower skeds."

UNTIL *Search* reached "clear space" the two stood watch-and-watch; then they could relax and settle into routine. Jay had agreed to Raelle's preferences in the matter of the Can's interior decor—"any colors you like," he'd said, "so long as they're not this drab grey." He liked the result: deck a very deep red, overhead pale green, aft bulkhead white, left chartreuse and right a dark orange. At front, the border around the ensemble of screens and controls was flat black. He had to admit, *Search* looked like no other Can he had seen—and that suited him, just fine.

Schedule to Harper's Touchdown gave *Search*'s capabilities considerable leeway; the port's agenda for the routines of living was guideline, only. Sleeping in high-static was neither easy nor refreshing—but since navigation in clear space meant only occasional course checks and even less frequent corrections, the answer was simple. On "dayshift" they ran full out; at "night" they pulled Skip down into the ten-fifth range and ran on automatic.

The cargo couldn't care—bacterial counteragents to fight the fantastic genetic ingenuity of Touchdown's

ever-mutating insect hordes, antifungals to protect humans from the shocking fungoid mutilations—and often death—that had befallen most of Harper's original group. Each shift Jay or Raelle checked the cargo compartments' temperatures, pressures, atmospheric consistencies; the Can's computer and its mechanisms kept all readings within approved limits. Jay said. "You know, Raelle? I think they really built us a good one, here."

She laughed. "If you didn't think so to begin with, why did you come along?"

"Simple answer." Skip was below ten-sixth, *Search* needed no attention. He went to her. "Because you did."

JUST ONCE, in clear space with the Can on automatic, they tried lovemaking in high ionization. At first the added sensations stimulated, but very soon they distracted instead, and finally became uncomfortable.

There was no question of trying the experiment again. "But anyway," said Raelle, "we learned something."

IN HARPER'S DAY, Touchdown had been five years from Earth. *Hawk Flight*—any Krieger ship—arching toward Galactic North to avoid major stellar distributions, could make the run in perhaps four months. *Search*, were a straight course possible, could have reached its goal in less than two days—with most of the time taken by initial accel and final decel. As it was, *Search* lifted directly outside the Galactic arm, described a partial helix in clear space, then drove straight in to Harper's Touchdown. The longer route took nearly a week.

RAELLE had piloted for takeoff; Jay did so for landing. First, too slow in reducing Skip Factor, he had to pass

the planet and circle back. His second approach was perfect.

From high above, the colony appeared as a group of irregular clearings in a vast sea of fernlike trees. Dropping closer, Jay saw buildings and realized how large those clearings were. Also there were several more than his map showed—but in one, confirming his choice of landing place, stood a ship.

He called down for clearance and received it in digital code, indicating that an automatic responder had identified his signal pattern.

He landed without a jar. Then, per regulations, they worked through the shutdown checklist and waited for colonial officials to approach the Can.

THEY HAD NOT LONG to wait. Within ten minutes a ground car, towing a cargo flat, came toward them. "An open car," said Raelle, "and they're not suited up, either of them. It looks as though we've missed sporing season."

"Or maybe this timeline's developed a really dependable immunizing treatment. Now *that* would be a goodie, to take back for distribution to other lines. But either way—"

"Yes." She nodded. "We stay sealed, of course, until someone tells us otherwise."

The car arrived and stopped. Seeing no sign of radio equipment, Jay activated their outside microphones and speakers. "Hello the car. Courier Search, with cargo as follows." Referring to the voucher, he read code numbers and quantities for each item. "I hope it's what you ordered."

From the car it was the woman who answered. "Pretty close, at that. You must not have Drifted much."

"We brought the usual Earth-status sheet," said Raelle, "so your com-

puter can probably give you a fair idea. And do you know if any timeline's had success in *mapping* the continua? Putting some kind of quantitative measurement on Drift?"

"Not so far. Anyway, I guess we can unload you now. You got here lucky, by the way—it's at least a month before next sporing, so you won't need suits and shots and protective ointment."

"We've had shots," Jay said. "Maybe not as good as yours."

The woman laughed. "Or maybe better. Another chore for the computer. All right—you'll be out soon?"

"If not sooner. Checklist's complete. How's the temperature?"

The woman gestured toward her own light jacket. "Like this."

"Fine," said Raelle. Jay turned off the sound system and they disembarked.

THE BRISK AIR smelled like moist, unripe wheat. After a moment Jay realized the scent came from the great fern forests and, at this season, must pervade the entire continent. By the time they reached the car, he no longer noticed it.

Both the man and the woman got out of the car to greet them. "Andrina Kaile." Shaking hands, Jay evaluated her—medium height, slim to thinness, firm grasp, crisp voice. Pale skin, nose almost too large but the grey eyes and full, wide mouth saved it. Black hair coiled at the nape, unusually high forehead. . . .

"And Carling Hennison." A big man redfaced, nearly bald—his hand engulfed Jay's but he did not exert his obvious strength. "Glad to see you, both of you," and now he shook hands with Raelle. "Ever been here before?"

"No," said Jay. "This is our first run."

"Then you won't know anyone yet," said Andrina Kaile. "May Carling and I offer you both our hospitality, this first night?"

"You're together, are you?" said Jay.

Hennison laughed. "Not lately—maybe again sometime; who knows? No—Andrina has her own house, and my rooms are comfortable enough, so—"

"And you've been cooped up all by yourselves," said Kaile. "I imagine you're ready for a little variety. Of course you may want to meet others first and then decide, but our invitations are still open."

Jay shook his head. Before he could word an answer, Raelle said, "Thank you; we're flattered. But you see, we are together, Jay and I. That is—we're Monogamists."

"Oh." Andrina Kaile gave a startled laugh, then cut the sound short. She looked puzzled. "I've never known any Monogamists very well—met a few, of course. Well, certainly I respect your right to your own beliefs. It's just that the whole idea seems such a waste."

Raelle's arm went around Jay's shoulders. "Not to us."

Hennison smiled and spread his hands. "Well, now—we're none of us offended, are we, by needing to reach this understanding? Still friends?" One by one the others smiled and nodded. "Then let's do our unloading and get in the car and go find some drinks." And as they entered *Search* he said, "I have a sister who's Monogamist. Backslides a lot, though, she does. Not that I'm suggesting anything."

Jay met the man's eyes. "Of course not." Then the work proceeded.

THE POPULATION of Harper's

Touchdown was barely out of six figures; the spaceport, such as it was, was administered directly by Colony Headquarters. Jay and Raelle were assigned a small suite—transient quarters—in the Admin Building itself, then joined Kaile and Hennison in the building's social lounge.

As they sat, Hennison poured beer from a large pitcher. "Whatever you're used to drinking, you have to try our local product first."

Jay sipped it. "Very good," and Raelle agreed. The four talked of the disparate Earths they knew. Jay and Raelle found few acquaintance in common with the other two, and those casual. Jay did not mention his parents, or the Frantiszeks.

A squat, muscular man approached the table. "Reyez Turco," Andrina said quickly, lowvoiced. "Captain of *Star Dragon*, the ship out there." And in a moment Turco, one hand on the back of an empty chair, introduced himself.

His voice was husky. "You're the Courier people?" Names exchanged, they shook hands and Turco sat. In his fist the beer glass was almost hidden. Without speaking he looked from one to the other, his large wide-set eyes shifting beneath shaggy brows. The black stubble that covered his rounded skull grew low on his forehead; along with his thick neck and hulking shoulders it almost gave him a brutish look. But the eyes, Jay decided, and the wide, sensitive mouth, contradicted that effect.

And finally he spoke again. "You're how long out from Earth?"

Jay answered. "Sixty days, a little over."

Turco gulped his beer; Hennison refilled the glass. "And I'm almost two years. Not all in one hop, you'd know—not with the Krieger power

systems. And I've had stopovers. I shipped for Eden As Amended; round trip, I thought. But there I found Haakon Aarnstaad and his old *Muspelheim* or *Bust*, stranded with cargo for Death Warmed Over. Long thought lost, that ship and captain—Skip Factor no more than eighty at best, and he'd been out . . . oh, I forget how long. But all it was, his Skip Unit failed and he limped in on plain drive and override, slow and eating time."

Turco tapped his glass on the table, swirling its contents. "So—Death Warmed Over was never any prize; maybe they needed Haakon's ship—ment to stay alive. I had room; we transshipped the cargo onto *Dragon*—end of the scheduled return load."

Hennison spoke. "What about *Muspelheim* and its people?"

"We worked on the ship—my engineers did—not much luck. Haakon took it—I offered him a lift, and did take on as many of his crew as there was room for—but he said no, that now it was *Earth* or *bust*. Next century, he may get there."

Raelle frowned. "Captain, this is all very interesting—and moving. But how does it tie into how long you and we have been away from Earth?"

Turco smiled like an angel, but his eyes held a fixed stare. "At Death Warmed Over we fought plague; when we were done, my ship wasn't crowded any more." Raelle tried to speak; Turco waved her silent. "I and the colony together couldn't scrounge up the fuel to get me direct to Earth. But here, I could get to. And here's where I—I found that Earth's not there any more."

"What?" For a moment, Jay stood.

"My Earth, I mean." Slowly, Turco nodded. "A shock, that was. No way of knowing, you see—only a few

Krieger ships out when we left, and none due back yet. I guess my Earth lagged behind some others, a few years. Anyway, off we lifted with good old *Dragon*—Skipping near two thousand, no mere sixty or eighty. We've got the Galaxy, I thought! But then I get to here—" The huge shoulders slumped. "And find I've lost my world."

"Captain Turco—" Hesitantly, Raelle spoke. "It may not be that bad. Sometimes there's very little difference—there aren't any rules; it's unpredictable, so far. Maybe you'll be lucky."

Turco sipped from an empty glass. "Maybe—maybe not. It's four hops I'll have had, not a mere two. But it's the *waiting*, now that I know what to worry about." He shook his head. "Fuel's low here, too. Lots of traffic lately; the stockpile's wiped out. And I landed near to empty—it's more than a month, nearer two, to synthesize what I'll need. And then at least three more to get home, whatever that turns out to be." The man's face clenched into strain patterns. "Fighting plague, chancing death—that was easier!"

Jay said, "I know, Captain. And if I could help, I would. But we can't go find out for you—even if we reached the same Earth you will, we couldn't come back *here*, the same. You see, sir? Sometimes questions just don't have good answers."

From under lowered brows, Turco looked at him. "Maybe. But that doesn't mean I stop asking." He stood. "Thank you for the company. Good evening." And with his quick, massive stride, he left them.

TURCO'S STORY cast a pall over the group. After a period of silence, Hennison said, "Is anyone else hungry?"

The kitchen's quite good here." Relieved, Jay nodded; the others agreed, and when the waiter delivered a fresh pitcher of beer they ordered food.

Dining raised Jay's spirits—the meal lived up to Hennison's recommendation—and the others seemed more cheerful also. Afterward, over liqueurs, Hennison told of variant Earths reported by previous Couriers. None of them, Jay thought, sounded alarmingly different.

Then Andrina Kaile said, "Something I always ask Couriers—I guess I'm just nosy, so don't answer if you'd rather not—is *why*. Why leave the Earth you know, when you can't get back to it?" She shrugged. "I wouldn't have, if I'd known the risk."

Raelle was silent; Jay thought carefully, then said, "Let's just say I lost something and hope to find it again."

Hennison nodded. "A good enough reason—so long as there is a fair hope. And you, Raelle?"

Jay did not expect her to answer, but after a pause she spoke. "I haven't even told Jay yet—and I won't, until I *know*. But this much, yes—I haven't lost anything. But there's something I never had and always wanted. *That's* what I'm looking for." Puzzled, Jay watched her, but she smiled and shook her head. She touched his hand, and said to the others, "I'm afraid I'm tired early. Our shifts on *Search* weren't geared to your days here."

Kaile and Hennison excused them, and the two went to their quarters.

COURIERS WERE SUPPOSED to wait at least two weeks between high-Skip flights. "If at all possible," the Admiral had added. "Very high Skip disorients memory for a while. A few days' rest and you settle down as good as new. But if you jump too often

without that rest, the damage can be cumulative—and permanent." Jay had noticed no gaps in his memory, until over the next few days he detected *improvement*. Raelle confirmed the phenomenon.

"The scary part," she said, "is that you don't realize anything's missing, until suddenly you remember more than you did yesterday."

"Yes. Well, now we *know* we'll follow Forgues' instructions."

WITH ANDRINA KAILE guiding, they explored the fern forest—as far into it as an hour's walk would take them. The giant cycads grew as high as fifty meters; beneath them, only scattered shafts of sunlight reached the ground. The deadly fungi, now dormant, ringed the base of each trunk. Andrina said that windstorms came a few months later, but now the air hung still. Jay remarked on the ground cover—low, sprawling plants with leaves like broadbladed grass, scattered in almost geometric precision but avoiding the immediate area around each fernlike trunk.

He thought he saw a flicker of movement but it did not recur. The meat and daily herds from Earth stock, he knew, did not venture here. "How about animals, Andrina? Something moved, over there."

She nodded. "Small creatures, only, here in the plains forest. Several species, but all obviously related. Mostly they stay up in the big ferns, and they're well camouflaged." He waited, and she said, "Coldblooded, smoothskinned vertebrates—viviparous hermaphrodites. About the intelligence level of a rat, the largest species, but not destructive. And a very odd skeletal structure—three legs on one side and two on the other, staggered, and half of them are

lefthanded, so to speak, with respect to the other half. Now the really strange part—" She paused a moment. "All mating, I'm told, is between complementaries, never between similars."

"And the creatures," said Raelle, "pose no problem to the colony?"

"Quite the opposite. They're helpful in controlling each year's wave of mutated insects—eat their weights, daily, in eggs, larva or adult bugs. The pentapods are even edible in a pinch, if you could catch one when you needed it. Not tasty, mind you, but edible. Actually they're fairly easy to trap. Be sure to cook them thoroughly, though—they're spore carriers, though not themselves affected by the fungus."

"For a headquarters type," said Jay, "you know a lot about the local fauna."

She laughed. "I should—part of my job is correlating reports to weed out duplications." She looked at her watch. "About time to start back. The time matches my appetite."

After so many sedentary days, Jay enjoyed the walking.

The day before scheduled departure—*Search* was fueled, and loaded with small cargo and the inevitable stack of reports—Jay and Raelle were summoned to the colonial governor's office. "Governor Makchuk's just back from the sea mines," Hennison told them. "He didn't want to miss you entirely, of course—but he sounds as if he has something more on his mind, too." He opened the governor's office door for them but did not enter.

The governor stood—a slim man with smooth grey hair and dark complexion. "Greetings—belated, but sincere. Come sit down." After shaking

hands, they did so. "Coffee?" Both accepted. "Now then—I've seen the cargo manifest, your Earth-status sheet, all the reports. Quite satisfactory. And how do you like Harper's Touchdown?"

Jay grinned. "Fine—*now*. I'm glad we missed sporing time; in training we went around for a few days wearing the skintights and masks over a coat of antifungal grease. The necessary fittings aren't the last word in comfort, either. How you stand it for a solid month. . . ."

The governor laughed. "We get paid for putting up with it, so we manage."

"Whatever you're paid," said Raelle, "you earn it."

They talked a few minutes longer; then the governor glanced at his desk clock. "There's another matter. Captain Turco has . . . a request. I'm not sure it's in my jurisdiction, but for the record I wish to be present. The captain is due here shortly."

Jay looked at Raelle and she at him; before either could speak the door opened. Reyez Turco entered. He nodded to the governor. "You've told them?"

"I left that for you, captain."

Turco brought a chair over to sit near the others, and declined the offer of coffee. He stared at Jay, then at Raelle. "I've thought it over," he said, "and decided. I'm delegating command of *Dragon* to my First Officer—and returning to Earth in your Courier Can."

While Jay was still finding words, Raelle said, "If *Search* could keep three of us alive from here to Earth—which it can't—you'd still have a poor idea there." Turco began to speak; she shook her head. "Do you know what *range* of Drift means? It's the term for how *much* different

you'll probably find Earth to be when you get there, and it depends both on Skip Factor and time of travel. If you're worried about change, you'd be making your odds worse—about six times worse—by riding a Can. If you could, and I've pointed out why you can't."

Turgo glared. "I wasn't done talking. And I'll *take* those odds, just to find out next week instead of months from now."

"But—" Jay did not continue; Turco cut him off.

"Your Can carries two; I'll be one of them."

Jay's hand slapped the desktop; startled, Turco watched him. "You're out of your authority, captain; Couriers are under direct, separate command of Admiral Forgues. That's for the record, only—I realize you could commandeer *Search* and count on losing Raelle and me, and Governor Makchuk's report of your act, in Drift." Turco's mouth opened but Jay's outthrust pointing finger silenced the man. "So you could get away with that part, and leave us to return on *Dragon*, if you have a trained Courier pilot. Though going with only one pilot—that's a bad risk, too. But otherwise—" He shook his head. "Your chance of reaching Earth alive—or anywhere else—is about as good as surviving naked on this planet through sporing time."

Grinning, Turco shook his head. "I know all this—you think I got my job by being ignorant? None of my people can pilot a Can, including me. *Dragon* would get me to Earth sooner than I could learn. I accept this. But that's the point—you *two* are trained. And I'll take that extra risk you cite, so all I need is one of you. Either one, though to a man of my tastes the young woman would be better com-

pany."

Raelle shook her head. "Forget that plan, captain. It's the one thing Jay and I will never agree to."

"No? What's the problem? Young love?" Turco shrugged. "Well, that comes and it goes—but I go to Earth."

"You don't understand," said Jay. "We're Monogamists—and vowed that Drift will never separate us."

Turco's fist clenched. "I'll have to settle for an alternate—if at all, but never mind that part. Now look—" He spread his hands. "Probably you won't even notice the difference, you know that? Keep at it until you make the right lucky hops—if you still want to bother, by that time. Once I'm home, that's up to you."

The governor cleared his throat. "Captain Turco—I must tell you, I cannot give countenance to such highhanded action."

Teeth bared, Turco said, "Let's see you try and stop me! Sure, you've got your hand on the fuel spigot for *Dragon*—but the Can's fueled, ready to go. My armed people outnumber yours, here, and they still take my orders. You understand me?"

While the governor drew a shocked breath, Raelle spoke. "Turco!" And to Jay, "No, let me say it—though I know you're thinking the same." Deliberately she inhaled, exhaled. "Turco—you won't ride *Search* to Earth. Here's why. If *you* try to fly it you'll kill yourself. Agreed?" The man nodded. "And if I fly it, leaving Jay beheading, I'll kill you."

"You?" Turco laughed. "I think I can handle you—or him, for that matter."

"Can you?" She almost whispered it; to hear, Turco leaned forward. "I'm trained, yes—can you force me to *use* my training?" She shook her head. "You wouldn't live past Skip

ten-fifth—neither of us would. All I'd have to do is . . . decide which mistake to make.” -

Turco looked from her to Jay. Jay said, “You’re right, Raelle—I’d have said the same thing. Probably not as well, though.”

Again Turco’s gaze went from one to the other. Hope left his face, and his voice came flat. “You’re insane, both of you—but you’ve beaten me. I could make you pay for that, I suppose—smash your Can and leave you stranded.”

Raelle shrugged. “If you’re that small, that spiteful, I suppose you could. I don’t know what drives you, captain—and it’s none of my business. But if you have to smash *Search* to save your ego, I suppose we can wait for another ship—commanded by a sane captain.”

For a moment Jay thought Turco would strike her; he tensed for action—but the man drew a shuddering breath and even tried to smile. “You’re right,” he said, “My troubles aren’t yours, and I’ve let them push me too far.” He shook his head. “I’m not like this—not like what I’ve been saying, here. It’s just that—oh, never mind.” He stood. “You’re free and clear of me, by your own guts and doing. Governor—I’d appreciate it if you’d forget this discussion.”

Makchuk looked up at Turco. “You have a good record, captain. Sometimes, under pressure, people go overboard; I think you’re back topside now. The record stays clear.”

Turco grinned. “Thanks. I won’t ask anyone to shake hands. But one thing, you two Can riders—I think your example’s going to help me some.”

He left the office. In the remaining few minutes, before Jay and Raelle

left also, no one mentioned Reyez Turco.

THEY SAW the captain once more—next day as they prepared to board, he approached. He held out an envelope. “I know it’s against rules—but could you take this and try to see that it’s delivered? It’s to my wife. Please?” The man spoke softly.

Jay felt pity, and heard it in the tone of Raelle’s answer. “Captain—do you know *why* there’s a rule against sending personal messages by Courier?”

The man nodded. “Sure—that the odds are, the message may not apply where it arrives.” His voice raised. “But that logic’s wrong—listen, you’ll see.” He gestured. “If there’s a hundred—thousands, maybe, of us three having this same argument—what if you *all* take the message for me? *Then* the odds are that on a number of Earths you can stop a lot of sorrow. You see it?” Anxiously, he frowned.

Raelle hesitated; Jay said, “Ships’ captains don’t get their jobs by being stupid, either, do they? I hadn’t heard that thought before; it’s a good one. But another thing—you know your situation, and what’s in that envelope—and we don’t. Think, now—think carefully. Are there alternatives of your problem, in which this letter could make things *worse*?”

“No.” Without hesitation Turco answered. “I’ve thought of all of it; I had to rewrite my letter four times. It can’t hurt—but it could help.”

“All right.” Jay took the letter, and now he and then Raelle reached to shake Turco’s hand. “I hope it helps for *you*, on whatever Earth you reach.”

“Thank you—thank you both.” Turco nodded and turned away.

Only when the two were aboard

Search did Raelle say, "He still drives himself too hard. He had to get well away from us, before he could start to cry."

SLANTING OUTSIDE the Arm again, building Skip for the vast arc of helix and then cutting it back for the clear-space plunge toward Earth—*Search* performed without fault. Now familiar with deep space procedure, Jay and Raelle became more confident. They adapted quickly, this time, to the periods of high ionization; their routine became settled and easy. When, six days out from Touchdown, *Search* neared the Solar System's outskirts, Jay saw that Skip was close to optimum for constant decel to Earth. Moments later they dropped through c-interface and watched the universe slowing to match them.

And this time the landing felt, to Jay, like a practice exercise.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER GLYNN supervised inspection and unloading of *Search*; within the hour she cleared the Can for routine overhaul. After another hour for debriefing, Jay had the chance to ask his question.

Glynn laughed. "That's part of the package now—all returning Couriers want to pump a computer terminal and get a sighting on this Earth before exposing themselves to it. And that's fair—you're the ones risking loss of valuable aspects of your lives—what you feel you have to know is none of our business. So we've installed some terminal booths near the transcient quarters. Feel free to use them; they're not monitored."

Despite his own needs, Jay frowned. "I—well, aren't you being awfully trusting?"

The tall woman shrugged. "You trained under Admiral Forgues—or

whoever holds his job on your world. What we trust is the system that puts people like Forgues in charge."

"I see. And with us, it *was* the Admiral—yes."

"Fine. Then other things should be about the same; too; you'll know your way around the port all right. Do you want quarters on base?"

"I'd think so," said Raelle. Jay nodded, and Glynn gave them an assignment slip. "You'll find the computer terminals easily enough; there's signs posted. So—welcome, then, and good luck."

As the two left, carrying their personal baggage from the Can, Jay said, "Well, on one thing they're ahead of us. Making Couriers feel at home."

AGAIN they had to adjust from ship's time to planet's. Not until the next morning did Jay and Raelle enter adjacent terminal booths, to learn what each needed to know. Jay ignored the larger issues—politics, the lot—and punched immediately for data concerning his parents.

Commander Harwood Jay Pearsall. Born—the date was correct. But—*died*? Had this trip been for nothing? Quickly he scanned. Killed in a transportation disaster, not by freak storm—and months later than Jay's own father had died. Something else nagged him, a discrepancy below the conscious level; he ignored it and punched for the facts about Glenna DeLais Pearsall, his mother.

Born? Right. Married? Right. Died? No. Relief make him shudder. But something didn't fit. Married now—but not remarried. And again he felt bafflement.

Back to his father's dossier, and now he saw the anomaly—the coding was not for a deceased spaceman, but for a man on active duty! Jay scanned

ahead. . . .

Next entry: two years after his death, Harwood Jay Pearsall landed on Earth as First Officer of *Hawk Flight*, Captain Vaille commanding. All right—he knew of Vaille. Let's see. . . .

And then the readouts, all of them, made sense. There were two *Hawk Flights* here.

WELL, OF COURSE. At moderate Krieger speeds the odds for a simple round trip were close to even, returning to one's own Earth or to another. Here, both had happened—and from another continuum, Glenna's husband had been returned to her.

Jay frowned. His mother's strict views—would she have accepted an alternate? Yet apparently she had done so. He shrugged. When he joined his parents—in happy anticipation, he shivered—either they'd tell him what had happened or they wouldn't. What did it matter? All was well now, and would be.

But was it? His mother's file—he didn't know what he'd seen that disturbed him, but it *felt* wrong. He looked again.

No. Of course he hadn't seen it; it wasn't there, and that was the trouble. *He* wasn't there; on this Earth his parents were childless, and Jay Pearsall did not exist.

When he could think again, he scanned the readouts fully, including personal details he was surprised to find available, and began to revise his plans. Completely.

WHEN HE LEFT the booth, Raelle was waiting. He spoke first. "You find what you wanted?"

"Maybe; I don't know yet. But *you* look bothered, Jay. Let's go get lunch and you can tell me about it." At his

look, she shook her head. "My problem's on ice; for a few days there's nothing I can do about it. So let's work on yours."

"All right. Oh—I forgot about Turco's letter. Did you think to post it?"

Raelle grinned. "An illegal message, through official channels? I sent it by private messenger. The address was right—I checked it with the computer terminal."

"Good. And I *am* ready for lunch."

At a nearby snack bar they ate lightly. Over coffee Jay told her what he had learned. "So I can't just go see them, the way I'd intended."

"Why not? Wouldn't they be happy to know you?"

He shook his head. "You don't understand—it's too risky. Glenna—this Glenna—wanted a child, badly. When she finally got pregnant she miscarried. And the complications—she couldn't try again. The fetus was probably me; the timing's right."

"Jay—on this Earth, you're dead?"

"Never existed, let's say. The problem, though—Glenna never really adjusted. The balance may still be wobbly; I can't risk what the shock might do. At least, I'm not going to."

He reached to clasp her shoulder. "So here's what I plan to do instead, so that I can *see* them, anyway. Help me work the bugs out of the idea, will you? So that we can keep our stories straight, before I call my—" His breath caught. "My *home*."

GLENNA PEARSALL opened the door, and Jay thought, *but she's not my mother!* He looked again; she was three years older, of course—and so was he. Now he could think. Slimmer, this one—more angular, not so rounded. His mother's chestnut hair—long and straight, usually coiled atop her head—was cut into short

curls. The smile—less relaxed, more wary. The grey-eyes gaze, still level and alert.

She reached to take his hand, and one of Raelle's. "So the Courier Corps brings me a nephew, when I've always had only nieces! Tell me—how is my sister?"

This was safe enough—in both their worlds, Janine DeLais and her husband Cimber Tanneha had emigrated to Earth's first and most successful colony, Second Chance. That fact, and Jay's strong resemblance to his mother, had dictated his choice of assumed relationship.

"They arrived safely; that's the last I'd heard. Don't ask me for details, yet—we're still suffering from high-skip blur."

"Of course," As Jay stared around him, seeing familiarities and differences, Glenna led the two inside. "And I realize that some things must differ considerably from what I know—for you on your own world to replace my niece Leonie." She saw them seated in the cool, pastel living room and left to bring an iced pitcher and glasses. "I hope you like daiquiris. I always make them up for when Woody comes home—he should be here soon—so I simply doubled the recipe."

"Daiquiris will be fine," Raelle said.

"And you're Jay wife? Or is it freemate? Customs vary so much. . . ."

Through the shock that still hazed Jay's thinking, he heard Raelle explain that they shared Janine's—and Glenna's—Monogamist beliefs. Glenna smiled and said, "Well, I'm sure I'd welcome you just the same if you followed other ways—but I must admit I'm pleased that some of the family stick to our traditions." She gestured toward the pitcher; Jay

shook his head—he had sipped barely a quarter of his frosted drink, and Raelle was in like case.

They continued to talk. Jay sensed a nervous tone in Glenna's voice, though she showed no other sign of tension. After a time, observing her, he began to see past the differences to the basic Glenna—not quite the mother he had lost and mourned, but another version she might have become. And here, of course, she had. . . . He watched—small gestures, quirks of expression—the smile that began, paused, then fulfilled itself. *I am glad I came here.*

Before an hour had passed, a sense of familiarity that he knew to be false had so comforted him that now he had to be on guard, to remind himself that here he was nephew and not son. When the picturephone chimed, the interruption came as a relief.

Glenna went to answer. "Woody—guess who's here!" Then she laughed. "No—you can't, of course." Quickly, pausing occasionally to choose her words—alternate realities caused language problems—she explained.

"Are you sure?" Jay could not see the screen, but in those three words he recognized his father's voice. "Since the alternate Earth concept was publicized, there's been a rash of impostor games—some of them not very nice. Let's see the young man."

Jay stood and moved to face the screen. For a moment, seeing his father alive again—thin, serious face, dark hair, ears slightly too large—he did not hear the man's words. "—do have a name, don't you?"

"Jay DeLais originally—Jay Pearsall, now. You—on my Earth you let me use the name's influence to get into space training. Politics are pretty bad there."

He saw Harwood Pearsall frown,

and waited; this was the weakest part of the story. Then the man shook his head. "You're related, all right. Looks more like you, Glenna, then like Janine."

Jay held his breath, but Glenna said, "Well, so does Leonie—and on his Earth, Jay was born in her place."

"Yes." The older Pearsall nodded. "Well, Jay—I hope you'll be around for a while. I'm looking forward to talking with you."

Glenna said, "What time will you be home, Woody?"

"That's what I called about—I won't, today. Out here at the auxiliary port we've got supply problems, schedule problems, equipment problems—and half the force down sick from some bad food served yesterday. I'll be working most of the night, at best. Call you tomorrow, as soon as I have any idea when I'll be free. I'm sorry, Glenna; these things happen sometimes."

Jay saw her disappointment, but she smiled. "Of course, Woody. Don't run yourself short of sleep, now."

"If I do, I'll catch it up. All right then—that's all for the moment. It's good to have seen you, Jay. You and Glenna arrange how we can get together when I'm through with this mess here."

Jay nodded; Glenna said, "Good-bye, Woody," and the screen went dark.

Raelle said, "Is it—does your uncle look about the same, here?"

"Just about. Say—we forgot to introduce you."

"That all right. Family first; there'll be time."

Now Glenna spoke. "Why—I hadn't thought of that. The differences, I mean. Am I the same here as on your Earth?"

No, thank God! You're alive. Shak-

en, Jay foundered over the lack of a correct tense in the language, and finally said, "Why don't I say it as though you *are* the same person and I haven't seen you for a while? Which I haven't, for two—almost three years. Training cruises, all that—and the last time I was in port, you and Uncle Woody were away vacationing." He hoped the improvisation sounded convincing. "Well, then." He looked at her. "You've lost weight—not a great deal, just about right but not really necessary. And your hair was long when I last saw you—and that's about all the difference I can see."

She nodded. "Your Earth must be closer—if that word means anything—to Woody's, than either is to this one." Her brows raised: "Oh—of course you don't know, do you?" And rather than admit he had snooped in the computer files, he let her tell him what he already knew, of *Hawk Flight* and the rest of it.

"And at first I couldn't accept him, Jay—because he wasn't *my* Woody, you see." She smiled. "And then I realized—I was making him unhappy, and myself as well, because of a creed that hadn't conceived of such a possibility, all the Earths, and the Drift between them. Oh, there was more to it than that—personal things. But finally I decided that a structure of beliefs is like a scientific theory—if it doesn't allow for *all* the facts, it must change."

Jay looked at this woman who had not borne him. She had been tested, he saw now, in ways his own mother had been spared—and from it, precarious balance or no, she had grown. He said, "That's a good thought to keep in mind. Thank you—Aunt Glenna."

She patted his hand. "Well, I hope I've learned a few things in life. Now

then—how are Janine and Cimber?”

He had thought ahead, for this question. “I’m afraid you’ll have seen them, if things were the same here, as recently as I have. I didn’t go to Second Chance at all, you see. The time was so short, before my pre-space training began.” His eyes widened; he raised his brows. “The fact is, I stayed *here*, with you—this house, on my Earth—during that time. And I guess I’ve been thinking that you remember that, when of course you couldn’t.” And now he had set another leg to support his structure of kindly lies, explaining if he seemed too familiar with the place and his parents. He did not miss Raelle’s approving nod.

“And on your world,” Glenna said, “Woody and I weren’t separated and reunited? Did we—?”

Before she could ask a more detailed question, he interrupted. “No—nothing like that. There, you see, he didn’t ride *Hawk Flight*—Miro Frantiszek went instead. And of course when the problem became known . . .” His parents were dead by that time, but Glenna took the meaning he intended her to see.

“That’s good.” Then, “Oh—you know the Frantiszeks—of course! Why, you’ll have lots of friends—their alternates, I mean—to see while you’re here. And I’d almost forgotten you’re in Couriers; how soon must you leave again?”

Miro and Ludmilla—certainly he must see them! How could he be so singleminded? Raelle said, “We have at least two weeks here, to avoid cumulative memory blur. About our next assignment—well, no one’s said anything yet.”

“Good,” said Glenna. “That will give us time to get acquainted.” She stood. “Now you *are* staying for din-

ner, aren’t you? When you called—expecting Woody, too, I set food preparing for four. Really—you can’t expect me to eat it all by myself.”

She laughed and they agreed. The rest of the visit, including mealtime, Jay found pleasant. As much as possible he steered the talk to his childhood years, but discussing others, not himself. Raelle and Glenna compared notes on mutual acquaintances and found several, though none especially close. When the two bade Glenna goodnight, Jay was satisfied with the first test of his camouflage.

But from all his life’s experience he knew that Harwood Pearsall’s mind was more inquisitive, less accepting, than Glenna’s.

THEIR INTERVIEW with Admiral Forgues came next morning; a young blonde receptionist showed them into his office. Jay liked her smile but something about her puzzled him; finally he noticed that her left eye did not track precisely with its mate. He decided that the defect titillated rather than disfigured.

The Admiral greeted them; the young woman left and they sat. Forgues leafed through a report; Jay recognized his own folder. The older man looked up. “So. You both know me, I gather—elsewhere, that is. Here I know *you*, Raelle—just finished training, almost ready to ship out. Off on leave for a few days. You, though—Jay Pearsall—any relation to the Commander?”

“Yes, sir. His nephew.”

“Didn’t know he had any.”

“Not on this timeline, no.” Time to switch subjects, before he had to use the name-change story. “But you, sir—it’s hard to believe—” He shook his head. “I’ve known you all my life—you administered our Courier

training—and you've never seen me before."

Forgues stared at him. "Takes some getting used to, doesn't it? You do look familiar—family resemblance, I suppose."

Jay was grateful when Raelle spoke. "We knew—you told us, yourself—we'd have to expect strange situations, Drifting the worlds this way. But your time's too valuable to waste, soothing novices; there's business, also, isn't there?"

Forgues nodded. "Thought you'd like to know about your next mission—if you go out again. Have you decided, about that?"

Jay hesitated; Raelle said, "We haven't talked it over yet. How soon do you need to know?"

"The one you're posted for—it leaves in fifteen days, gives you some safety factor for memory conservation. We've assigned backup personnel, of course. I'd appreciate a decision at least five days before takeoff."

Jay looked at Raelle, then said, "Certainly; that's reasonable. And the mission itself?"

"Down to cases; right. You've heard of the colony called Nobody Home?"

After a moment Jay nodded. "Yes, sir. Established fairly recently—and wasn't there some controversy about it?"

"Too right, there was. Funds short, for colonizing. A big fuss between Nobody Home's backers and a faction greedy for the exotic minerals in the traveling seas of Sluicebox. Plus the usual fence straddlers who think you can stretch your money by shorting your colonies' reserves; they always lose but they keep trying. Well, Nobody Home got first nod and Sluicebox got the ten-year delay—which may be more than that, the way things go."

"So our run," said Raelle, "would be to Nobody Home?"

"Yes. The first resupply ship got back and reported a minor cargo error. Except that to the colonists it's not so minor. Some small but vital equipment components were mislaid, not shipped. A Courier Can will carry enough to last until the next regular ship can get there. The schedule's tight, in a sense—but not tight enough to short you on your stay time here." Brows raised, he looked at them.

Raelle was silent; Jay said, "If we go again—you realize, this is our first return and we haven't quite digested the jolts yet—well, the assignment itself sounds fine." And Raelle nodded.

"Good, good." The Admiral sorted through papers, found one. "Something else—since you won't get the regular briefing, likely. For the big ships, we think we've eliminated Drift."

Raelle said, "An improvement in the Skip Drive? Could it apply to Couriers?"

"No—to both questions. We've gathered data, that's all. Below Skip Factor twelve hundred there's been only one case of Drift—and on a long haul, that one—below one thousand, none at all. Whereas at two thousand only one ship, on a brief practice mission, did *not* Drift. In between—well, the Labs are working up tables on it, for the few cases we have as yet. Eventually we can assign Skip rate for any given distance—with a safety factor, of course. For now—well, it slows things down, but we're redlining at ten-third and that's that." His brows lowered. "Of course this makes the Courier program all the more essential, for a time."

Jay grinned. "Sure—to let the colonies know there'll be delays, and fill

in with crucial items that can't wait."

"You see it; good. Young man, if you don't go out again, I have work for you here, on the administrative end." He sighed. "You can't imagine some of the people I have to work with; they don't *think* in Skip terms. Even the math doesn't get it across to them."

Forgues stood and shook hands; the interview was over. "Let me know, then?" They affirmed their agreement and left.

Outside, "Raelle? Do we go again, or stay?"

"I don't know yet. I thought maybe you did."

"No."

"Then we leave it open, for now."

And back in their quarters, it seemed to Jay that they strove together more for reassurance than for love or pleasure.

THE KNOCK surprised them. Jay donned a robe; Raelle pulled up the bedcovers. Opening the door Jay faced a short, heavyset woman; she smiled but said nothing. He looked at her—not only heavy but downright fat—with green eyes in a pale face, and a huge mass of frizzy black hair. He liked the smile; he said, "Help you?"

"Messenger's receipt—brought me letter—this address for return. Raelle Tremona—she here?"

The sheet drawn around her, Raelle sat up. "I'm Raelle Tremona."

The woman came forward. Jay moved aside and she went to Raelle, and hugged her. "Honey—what you did—you'll never know." The covers slipped; Raelle pawed for them and the woman laughed. "No need for to be modest. You don't have the fats, like me." But she stepped back.

With neither haste nor deliberation

Raelle left the bed, walked nude to the chair on which her roomcoat lay, and covered herself. She said, "I've sent only one letter, here. Would you tell us your name?"

The woman nodded; her every move showed vigor. "Alisha Kazintogas, wife of Reyez Turco and Mordecia Destarn and—and one no ship brings home again, I think. Now—take coat off a while, can I? Have drinks, maybe?"

Jay stepped to the sideboard. "Yes, of course." He filled three small glasses, spirits over ice plus a dash of water. "Drink hearty."

"I always do—but not too heavy." With the coat laid aside Jay saw that the woman's bulk was firm, not flabby. The thick arm reaching for the glass—its flesh rippled but did not sag from the strong bones. Alisha Kazintogas sipped, swallowed, raised the glass and said, "Here's it to you. Reyez comes home, any one of him, I'm welcome waiting. No letter, I'd be gone and never his again. Too mixup for explaining. Just my thanks, all you need—but them you got. All right?"

For a time they drank and talked; Jay was not sure of all of Alisha's meanings. At one point he thought she was offering—urging upon him—her sexual favors. But if so—and if his cautious statement had been understood, of why he must decline—Alisha took everything in good part. "Sure, Jay—everybody do what they got to. Come see us sometime. Reyez pour *you* some drinks, much as you can stand up with. Maybe more; you come see."

And when the woman had gone, Raelle said, "Jay? I see why Turco was desperate about losing that woman. Do you?"

"Yes. Something about her—the

spirit, the vitality she has. If you ever came to love Alisha, she could be *all* your life."

WHEN JAY CALLED the Frantiszeks, Ludmilla answered. He explained that he was a Courier, a relative of the Pearsalls in his own timeline, who had known Miro and Ludmilla in his childhood. The small, dark woman smiled—the same smile Jay remembered. Her long heavy braid swayed with her nod. "Of course you must visit us; Glenna told me of you, and of your wife. Could you both join us here at dinner this evening?"

For himself, Jay accepted. Raelle had gone out—"I have my own quest, remember? I'll call you as soon as I have anything to tell—leave the phone set to record when you're away, will you?"

Her secrecy worried him, but she smiled and kissed him as she left.

"I'm sorry she cannot be with us also," said Ludmilla. "Perhaps another time, before you go out again?"

"I hope so." The call ended, and Jay sat thinking—again he must keep clear in his mind the difference between his own memories and those of his hosts.

TWO YEARS and Drift had not changed Miro Frantizek; the tall man, grinning, pumped Jay's arm in handshake. "Skip Drive has a lot to answer for, but when it brings new friends I can't complain." Jay followed him inside, where Ludmilla rose in greeting. "Milla tried to tell me just who you are in your own timeline, but I admit I didn't get it all straight."

"I am not *quite* certain, myself," his wife said. And when Jay retold his story, she said, "But—you mean there is no Leonie now? That dear girl! I—"

Jay waved a hand. "That's in *my* timeline, the one I left. In this one she went to Second Chance with the rest of the family, so—"

"No." Ludmilla shook her head. "She has probably Drifted, like so many—and is gone, and all your family with her. You do not bring good news, I fear. Though of course it is not your fault—had I thought, I would have realized."

"Hold it a minute, Milla." Miro held a bottle of wine; he gestured with it. Jay nodded, and the man poured three glasses. "Remember—Cimber and Janine and the girls, they emigrated *before* we had the Krieger power units—at low Skip, comparatively. So they're bound to be on our timeline, still. There hasn't been time for a message to reach us yet; that's all."

Ludmilla flushed. "Ah—so much turmoil, confusion, since we learned of Drift. I lose track sometimes. I am sorry."

"No," said Jay. "I don't blame you. Even when you're trained for it, keeping things straight isn't easy." And suddenly his camouflage burdened him.

He had to change the subject. "Would you tell me about my family as you remember them? You know—as a child I stayed with you sometimes. Did Leonie?" He knew she had; occasionally the Frantiszeks had taken the four cousins to a lake cabin, weekends. And Ludmilla told of these events, some almost the same as he remembered—except that here he had not been present, here he had not been born.

But by the time dinner and the evening were done, he felt as though he were a part of what she told.

BACK AT QUARTERS he thumbed for

recorded messages. The screen lit to show Raelle, smiling. She spoke quietly. "Jay—I've found it, what I was looking for. Time's short for me, though. I hope you won't mind too much, but I'll be away a few more days—four, I think, or maybe five. And then—I don't *know*, Jay, I just don't know. As soon as I do, I'll call you. And—" She shook her head. "No—for now, that's all. But I do love you."

The screen dimmed. Staring at its blank face, Jay sat unmoving. What had Raelle found—or whom?

Now I know how Turco felt. . . .

THE THOUGHT of losing her was intolerable—so he faced it squarely. No matter how total his own commitment, if she chose to go he could not hold her. And what then?

He stood and paced. Monogamism did not demand that a widowed or deserted spouse remain single. So someday—no matter that the prospect repelled him now—he would muster interest to seek another. Here, might it be? Or elsewhere? Go Courier again and hope to find her counterpart?

No. He shook his head. Whatever took his own Raelle would always lurk—if only in his mind—to strike again.

Someone else, then—but on this Earth, or not? He could not decide, and now his other concerns in this timeline, nagging at the back of consciousness, came to the forefront. He had not yet met his father's counterpart; that meeting would come tomorrow. But what of Glenna? Now he sat, recalling and visualizing her, trying to sort through his mixed feelings.

All right. He liked and admired her, felt a certain affection. But it was his mother he mourned and loved,

and by the simple blameless fact of her miscarriage, this Glenna had not shared the experiences that built his love. The relationship was wholly in his own mind, not in hers. Even if he told her, she could not make the lost years real. Her motherhood would be an artificial thing at best—and then if he went out again, a cruel and unnecessary loss.

His decision made itself. He would meet Harwood Pearsall—and with some trepidation—but would not reveal himself. So that whatever happened, he could stay or go without giving hurt.

Somehow the tension, his worry about Raelle, had eased. Now, in relative calm he could endure the waiting. He shrugged and flexed his arms, stretching tightened muscles. "Pearsall," he said aloud, "you need a drink. Or more. But not too many." He showered, dressed in casual garb and set out for the nearest restaurant on the base. The bar there, the version on his own timeline, was quiet and catered to a friendly crowd.

The walk was long enough to feel like good exercise.

AT A SMALL corner table he looked around the place he knew and yet did not. Same lighting fixtures but a new color scheme; he favored the warm orange here over the pastel blue he remembered. Sipping a cold daiquiri he looked with approval at the carafe, sitting before him in a bowl of ice, from which he had poured it. No, he thought—not enough booze to turn his head over. Just the right amount. . . .

To his left, past an empty table, a group of young people were slightly boisterous in laughter and loudness. From the few phrases he caught, Jay knew them as Courier trainees at

their final pre-assignment party. He had the urge to join them—but pitting his experience against their anticipations would be unfair. He sipped the last from his glass and poured it half full again.

The girl sat across from him before he recognized her. She said, “I know you, don’t I? You’re—oh, let me see—”

He saw she was not drunk, merely allowing herself the exhilaration a little alcohol brings to those who drink seldom. And again he decided that her offtract blue eye was an asset, not a detriment.

“Sure,” she said. “The Courier—came in just the other day. From Harper’s Touchdown?” He nodded. “Oh—what was it? *Seeker*?”

“*Search*,” he said. “You were close.”

Smooth blonde hair hardly moved when she threw her head back, laughing. Then, “I’m not really drunk. But don’t let me sample whatever you’re having for—oh, at least twenty minutes.”

“All right. Do you remember my name?” Her pale green dress was quite sheer—and her slim upper torso did not suffer by the exposure.

“Not exactly. I do remember—you’re related to someone.”

He grinned; this was fun. “Isn’t everyone, nearly?”

“Oh, you know what I mean.” Briefly, she frowned. “Now it comes—I’d forgotten—Commander Pearsall! Am I right?”

“Bullseye. I’m Jay Pearsall—his nephew, where I come from, but not here.” He drank more than a sip. “And your name? I don’t think I’ve heard it.”

“Course not. You come in, I ask yours, punch you up on the desk screen. Depending on what it says, I let

you in to see Forgy or I don’t. Zip-
zip. Big waste of time, you see, for me to introduce *me*.”

He waited, until she said, “I’m Saela Blumquist. Shake hands?”

She stood, so he did also. Her dress was sheer not only at its top; all down the length of her he saw pale, smooth skin. As they sat again he felt urgency.

He shook his head. “How long have you worked at the base?”

“Four years—I’m older than I look. But not *terribly* older.”

“Do you like your job?”

“Yes—lots. I’m where everyone comes through, you see, who’s *doing* things. I’m only on the edges but at least I’m *in* it; that’s something.” She leaned forward. “Can you converge on that?”

Her hand was extended; he gave it a brief pat. “You want to go out yourself, do you, Saela?”

Her mouth made an ugly grimace; she shrugged. “Someday, maybe—if it’s not too late for me.” She looked at him. “Don’t misunderstand—I do love my mother, and I’m not absolutely sure I want to leave Earth. But I can’t even talk it over—every time I mentioned the idea, back when I was too young for training, even, she’d start to have one of her heart attacks. I *think* they’re fake, you see, but still . . .”

Jay nodded. “Blackmail, it’s called.”

“Probably.” Saela shook her head, heard enough to ruffle her short, fair hair. “That’s enough about me, for now. And I think I *can* use a drink.”

The bowl held extra glasses; Jay poured. She took a sip and said, “Where’s your partner?”

Before he thought, he said, “I don’t know.” Then he heard the sound of it. “I didn’t mean—it isn’t—”

She was squeezing his hand. “The

hell is isn't. Troubles; right?" She took her hand away and toyed with her glass. "You want to say it?"

He shook his head. "Too complicated."

"Nothing is, if you're ready." She smiled. "So you're not; that's all right." She drank a little. "Only one more question, on the topic. Would you like to come home with me—or me with you?"

A rush of warmth almost drowned him; he had trouble breathing. This girl—why was he so vulnerable? With one deep breath he braced himself. "Sacla, how can I tell you how much I appreciate you—what you've said?"

Her hand gestured. "Easy enough—just say where we're going."

"But that's it, you see. I can't." Haltingly he explained his reasons—then, in a rush, he told her of Raelle's call.

When he was done, she said, "Really caught in the Drift, aren't you? And not much I can do for you, though I'm a good pillow, more ways than one. And not indiscriminate, by the way—I mean, give yourself some credit. But if you can't, you can't—I don't agree with your ideas but I do respect them." She smiled, and for a moment both eyes seemed to focus on him. "I'll tell you what. If you do lose out, look me up—whatever else, we can talk. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, and thanks. Now—let's discuss something else, shall we?"

When all the drinks were finished, the evening ended in compromise. Sacla came to Jay's quarter and they slept in the same bed, warm together. But no matter what his urges—and Jay refused to think of hers—they did not share each other. And next morning, after breakfast, she left for work.

HARWOOD PEARSALL opened the door,

that afternoon, to his visiting "nephew". Shaking hands, Jay appraised the older man—tall, the hair still dark above his thin face—all the lines and contours familiar. No—over the left eyebrow, a scar his father had incurred before Jay's birth—it was missing. *Remember—he is not the same!*

Jay found himself under inspection also. "Come on in, son." *What?* No—only a colloquialism; Jay relaxed. "Don't mind if I gawk a little—trying to relate you to this timeline, that's all. I imagine you've already learned that these things aren't easy."

"Yes, I have." Entering the house this second time, Jay could pay heed to things he had not noticed before. But only briefly—Harwood Pearsall still watched him, and Jay marshalled his alertness. "You and Aunt Glenna—you seem enough the same as I knew you, if helps ease the Drift jolt." Did that sound right? Jay felt his armpits heat and moisten. "I suppose experience helps, for Couriers."

"Possibly. I'm not well acquainted with any; they're never here long enough."

"No, of course not." A new thought—all a Courier's friendships must be transitory. Except one . . .

They entered the living room. "Glenna's not home yet. She's working with her theater group again—directing now, though, more than acting. So I have dinner on—and I'd better go look at it. I warn you, I'm a plain cook—nothing fancy." And over his shoulder as he left the room, "In your timeline, is Glenna into theater work?"

His mother had never acted; he was sure of that. He raised his voice to reach the kitchen. "Not that I know of. When I was little, maybe, but not in recent years."

Pearsall brought a pitcher and glasses. "Glenna said you and—what's her name again?—that you both like daiquiris, so here we are."

"Thank you. Her name? Raelle—Raelle Tremona." But he did not want to speak of her, not now. "I'm told you've Drifted once, yourself. I—" He broke off, realizing the matter might be sensitive.

But the older man smiled. "That was a rough time. I thought I might be going Courier myself, but it worked out all right." He leaned forward. "Reminds me—if you don't mind talking about it, why did *you* join the corps?"

To his own ears the story sounded thin—but if he kept it consistent, Jay knew, there was no way to prove it false. "Politics, I guess, as much as anything. I mentioned how we had to finagle to get me into space training at all? That was because I didn't have the usual bribe money." Jay knew of an earlier bribery scandal, but the situation was long since corrected. Harwood Pearsall said as much—for his own timeline.

"Well, on ours," said Jay, "it got worse, instead. Do you have the All Peoples' Benefits Party here? Everyone but the newstadies calls it the Santa Claus Party, of Bread'n'Circuses." The Party existed in both worlds; Jay was merely expanding its role.

Woody laughed, then sobered. "Those cretins? But if they ever got on top—I agree, they'd be no joke. And in your world, I gather, they did?"

"Yes. Unfortunately, the one thing they do well is hang onto power. Their majority's usually slim but they always get it." He shrugged. "The corruption and abuse kept getting worse. I thought space would be a

way out—but even on the base, in training, there were pressures. So when the Courier program began, with all its possibilities, I entered it."

"No reluctance—no misgivings?"

"Well—my parents and sisters were gone to Second Chance. I'd been close to you and Aunt Glenna, and to the Frantiszeks—until training took all my time, or most of it. When you know space is going to be your life, anyway. . . ." He grinned. "And then I met Raelle, and she was going out—so I had to." The grin stopped; he remembered Raelle's call.

Woody nodded. "Not much to anchor you, then, and good reasons for leaving. And you're from spacing stock, at that—Cimber's parents, you'll recall, survived the first Tau Ceti expedition."

"I know. *Before Skip Drive*—crowding light and paying for it, returning decades out of their own time." He shook his head. "In a way, that makes Drift dislocation look like moving across the street, doesn't it?"

Pearsall chuckled, and left to check the kitchen again. Returning, he said, "You've got good perspective, Jay. I—" The front door opened.

"Hello! I'm not late, am I?" Glenna came in, kissed her husband and patted Jay's shoulder. She sat and accepted a drink. "I think I'm getting it right," she said. "The play, I mean. The trouble was, you see—" And she began to describe the evolution of a dramatic production—and her concurrent education as a novice director.

Jay was soon lost in unfamiliar terminology—and, glad to be out of the limelight, relaxed gratefully. Woody, judging by his comments, followed his wife's story well enough.

Then, soon, came dinner. After the first few bites Jay said, "Call yourself a plain cook if you like, Uncle

Woody—but next time I won't believe you." He knew the meat was almost certainly culture-grown, but in flavor it equalled what he'd tasted from the herds on Harper's Touchdown. He said so.

Woody Pearsall smiled. "Well, thank you. I did learn a few tricks aboard *Hawk Flight*—our chief cook could make you smack your lips over broiled plastic."

Jay affected surprise. "On a ship that size, you had to put up with Couriers' rations?"

Glenna laughed. "It never fails—spacemen swapping whoppers. Oh, go ahead—I enjoy it."

After a time, though, the talk became more general. Occasionally Jay noticed Woody's gaze intent on him, but the searching questions he dreaded did not come. And when the evening ended, he returned to quarters in a pleasant mood.

That feeling lasted until he checked the phone. He found no messages.

NEXT DAY, leaving a recording in case Raelle should call, he went to a vacation resort that catered largely to space personnel. There he swam, hiked, sunned himself, gambled sparingly, drank to the brink of excess but no further, and sampled some approved hallucinogens his own Earth had not developed. After three days he could no longer convince himself that he was having a good time, so he checked out and returned to the port.

Still, Raelle had not called. For an uncomfortable part of that night, Jay did not sleep.

WHEN SHE DID CALL, he was out. Returning from breakfast he viewed the recording. Raelle smiled as she said, "Sorry I missed you, Jay, but I'll be back this evening—rather late, I

expect." For a moment, laughing, she looked aside to someone outside his view, then back to him. "Jay—I'm so happy—it's every bit as wonderful as I'd dared to hope. And tonight you'll meet someone—a Courier, like us, who's leaving tomorrow." She paused, then said, "We'll see you tonight."

The screen darkened; after a time Jay looked away from it. Within him, thought battled feeling. *Who*, that Raelle had been with—was still with—would he meet tonight? She'd never told him who or what she sought. A lost love, a recapturing of the past?

But she'd said she was happy, *and* that the person was leaving. A brief fling, a completion of some sort? Or—would Raelle depart with the other?

He shook his head—*one thing at a time*. There was no proof that she had betrayed their vows. If she had, and still wanted to return to him—what would he do?

The answer hit like a hammer—*of course* he'd take her back. The hurt—to him and to their closeness—it could be bad, perhaps permanent. Even his mother's strict brand of Monogamism, though, allowed the right to forgive. . . .

But what if she chose to leave him, to go with the unknown other? Suddenly he could not face a day of loneliness—but who did he know?

He thought, then turned to the phone and punched code for the Admiral's office. As he had hoped, Sacla Blumquist answered.

"Headquarters, Admiral Forgues—oh, hello, Jay. Well! I've thought of you lately—did your problem work out?" Her offtrack gaze narrowed to a squint. "From your looks, I guess it hasn't."

"No. Sacla, I'd like to see you

again. Could we meet for lunch? Where we had drinks the other evening?"

"Let me check." She looked down; he could see the movement of her upper arm and judged she was turning pages of an engagement pad. "Yes," she said. "Sure—and I'll tell my relief that it may be a long lunch." She set the time; he nodded. "Then I'll be there, Jay." She smiled and cut the circuit.

What good it might do, he didn't know—but he had to talk with her. His motives? He shook his head—if Raelle left him, certainly Saela Blumquist could never fill her place; her attitudes and his could never match. But still his instinct drew him to her.

Finally he shrugged—Saela had warmth and compassion, and she already knew his problem. Comfort and understanding, he decided, were all he sought—and he would make sure to invite nothing more.

JAY ARRIVED EARLY; when Saela joined him he had obtained a table. She hung her light wrap over an empty chair and sat. She wore a blue-green dress, cut perfectly to his slim form.

"I told Forgy we'd probably be having daiquiris. He says that for lunch, two's my limit." Then, her expression serious, "What's happened, Jay?"

When their drinks were served and menus lay open before them, he told her. "So I don't really know anything—whether it's all right, whether I can *make* it all right, or nearly—or whether it's all shot to hell."

She touched his hand. "Poor Jay—your beliefs don't make life easy for you, do they? Too bad you weren't raised to be a little more liberal." He felt his face stiffen; she gestured and

said, "Oh, nothing extreme—the Pansexualists seem to have just as much trouble with their own ideas." She shrugged. "The more moderate ways—they're more comfortable to live with, that's all."

"Maybe." He shook his head, drank from his glass. "Most kids, I guess, do the rebellion part for a while and come out of it with whatever modification suits them, of their upbringing. I never got around to that; maybe if my folks hadn't been killed, I would have."

The waiter came; they ordered. When he had gone, Saela said, "Why me, Jay?" Before he could answer, "Sure, you know I like you—and you've already given me the background—so I'm the perfect listener. But are you sure you know why you asked me here?"

"You just said it. What else could there be?"

"Let's look at it." She raised one finger. "If all's well, then you're right—a little listening and support, that's all you need." A second finger. "Or if she leaves you—same again, because as a replacement I wouldn't suit you and you know that, too." Now a third finger. "But if things are broken a little—or maybe a lot, but not all the way—then I think you want something more, whether you know it or not."

Jay frowned. "I don't follow you."

"You will in a minute. Look—here you are—you've already forgiven what you probably think is her misspent past, and now maybe it's all to do over again. It won't be easy—"

"I know that—but I'd have to anyway."

"Interrupting's bad manners. I was saying, it won't be easy to do it *right*—without resentment or being more-righteous-than-thou." Under the

blonde bangs, brushed to smoothness, her divergent gaze held on him. "Your setup's out of balance, Jay—you have to do all the forgiving, and *she* has all the burden of accepting it."

Still he did not understand. With a brief pout, she said, "It'd be lots easier on both of you, if you had a little matching guilt to offer." She held thumb and forefinger a centimeter apart. "Just a little, you see." She smiled. "It wouldn't be at all difficult, Jay—I told you I was set for a long lunch break."

He stared at her. "But I don't even *know*, yet. And—" He shook his head. "I couldn't, anyway." Now their food arrived; again they paused until the servitor left. Then he said, "Why, it would be like retaliation—tit for tat, getting even."

"Not unless that was your motive—and I don't think you're the sort. Now about *my* motive—" She grinned. "That's simple. I like you and you attract me—and in my moderate way of thinking, there's no place for guilt. Especially if it turns out I'm helping do you both a favor."

While he thought about it, they ate. Then he put down his laden fork and said, "I can't share that view; I appreciate your intent, though. Thank you, Saela."

One side of her mouth smiled. "I can't help you, can I? All right—for now. But if the dice come up that way, think again, will you?"

From politeness he agreed, then changed the subject, asking Saela her impressions of the Courier service as an effective tool. But all the while he listened, he wondered: was she right?

HE WALKED HER to the Admin Building, then returned to his quarters. In the corridor approaching them he met Harwood Pearsall.

"Well—Uncle Woody!"

The other smiled briefly. "I couldn't reach you. Left a note on your door. All right if I stay and visit a while?"

"Of course; glad you came." At the door, Pearsall reclaimed his note and crumpled it into a pocket. Jay opened the door.

"Come in, Uncle Woody."

Not until they were inside, the door closed, did the older man answer. "Let's be rid of Uncle Woody, shall we? You see, son—I know who you are."

JAY'S THOUGHTS would not focus. "How—? I don't understand."

"Neither do I, fully. Some, but not all of it. Let's sit down." Then he said, "How do I know? Well, not from the computer, of course. There's no point in taking extensive personal data on visiting Couriers—and you skimped some on what they do request. No—first it was just a hunch. Wishful thinking, I told myself. Then I began to notice. It's feasible you could resemble Glenna more than Janine—and in some ways, neither. But the other side of your genetic mix didn't come from Cimber Tanneha—it came from *me*." He paused. "Another me, obviously. Jay—you have my hands."

"Hands? But—"

"Fingerprint patterns. Not identical, of course. But the types of patterns, and their distribution—those can be inherited the same as eye color. Cimber's aren't too different from Glenna's or Janine's, except in detail; mine are. And yours and mine are so similar that—well, smudge a bit, it would take an expert to tell them apart." He grinned. "Does that convince you—son?"

Lowvoiced, Jay spoke. "I snooped

the computer files. And here, I was never born; I miscarried. Mother—Glenna, I mean—never adjusted completely. I was afraid—the shock—and if I go out again soon—”

His not-father nodded. “I thought that might be why—and maybe you’re right. Glenna walks a tightrope, Jay. She lost me once, you know—and even now, when Forgues says we can beat the risk of Drift, she’s not willing for me to go to space again.”

“And before I was born, she lost me.”

“Yes. So I haven’t told her about you—and I’m not sure that I should.” The older man cleared his throat. “Now then—something I need to know. Why *did* you go Courier?” He waved Jay to silence. “A little thinking, and your story won’t wash.”

“But in *my* world—”

“No. I ran a computer simul; the odds against Bread’n’Circuses gaining power are too long. But I don’t need odds; one fact does it.”

“I don’t see—”

“With that outfit in charge there wouldn’t *be* Couriers, and you know it. They’d ground our ships as soon as they returned, and leave the colonies to die on the vine. They don’t look outward.”

Jay grinned. “You’ve got me—but it was the best I could think of, on short notice.”

“And not bad, if other things hadn’t set me suspicious. But desk work gives me too much time to think—and I did.” Before he could continue, a knock interrupted him. Jay went to the door and opened it—to Glenna.

She spoke first. “Why didn’t you tell me you’re the son I never had?”

SHE KISSED HIM, they embraced, Woody hugged them both—*why, we’re all three crying*. When he had

breath again, Jay said, “Anyone want coffee, besides me?” *I need time to think!*

He made and poured it; they all sat, looking at each other but silent. Then Woody spoke. “Is it all right, Glenna?”

She pushed rumpled hair back from her forehead and turned to Jay. “I’d forgotten—suppressed the memory—what we’d planned to name you. And I wouldn’t have remembered, probably. But tomorrow’s Leonie’s birthday, you see. And if it’s yours, also, I thought—well, a party, of course. So I called the port and asked the girl in the Admiral’s office, if she could find out for me. And it was recorded.”

Woody frowned. “Different worlds, Glenna . . .”

She shook her head. “Not so different. Jay’s birthday can’t be Leonie’s; it’s the wrong time of the wrong year. But it’s within the *week* of when I was expecting. You see? And then I remembered.”

She looked at Jay until he had to answer, to explain why he had chosen to conceal himself. When he was done, she nodded; a loose curl brushed her eyebrow. Fear for her gripped Jay as he waited, but she said, “Protecting me, were you? Both of you? Well, I appreciate it, how you must have felt—I didn’t handle things too smoothly, did I, for a few years?”

Now she leaned forward, slowly thumping the edge of one hand against the other’s palm. “I’ll admit,” she said, “my first reaction wasn’t very good. But then I looked deeper.” She smiled. “And do you know what I found?”

“What, Glenna?” said Woody. Jay merely shook his head.

“The miscarriage cost me my every chance of motherhood. But you,

Jay—in this world it cost you your very life! Now by *any* standard, which loss is the greater?”

Tears trickled past the corners of her smiling mouth; Harwood Pearsall went to his wife and held her. She kissed his cheek, then said, “Seeing you *alive*, Jay, and knowing—it’s taken away the load of all these years.” He started to speak but she shook her head. “No, I don’t expect you to stay and be my son. Do you know why it wouldn’t work?” She told him; her reasoning was the same as his own. “And besides, you wouldn’t be a Courier if you weren’t looking for something. Can you tell us what it is?”

“Just before you got here,” said Woody, “I was asking the same thing.”

The time’s so short—I have to be honest. Jay explained.

Glenna paled, then her color returned. “Dead, both of us? And you only sixteen. It’s a real tribute to our counterparts, that you came searching. I hope Woody and I, here, could have—that you’d have—”

“I’m sure you would; it’s just that—”

Harwood Pearsall shook his head. “That it didn’t happen. By our own brand of bad luck we’re not your parents and can’t be. So you have to go looking for a better matchup.” He squeezed Glenna’s shoulder. “We understand, don’t we?” She nodded.

Pearsall grinned. “But somehow, Drift or no Drift—you and any other Jay who may come here, you’re our sons. And next time, if ever, no hankypanky—I’ll level with your alternate, first thing.”

Thinking about it, Jay swallowed. “And on other Earths, if things are the same, so will I.”

Glenna stood. “Then we’ll all have

gained, won’t we?” She looked at her watch. “I’m late for rehearsal. But that’s all right—I expected to be. Jay—you’ll come see us again before you leave?”

“Of course. And—I’m glad you caught me out, both of you!”

“Me too—son,” said Woody Pearsall. The three embraced and said goodbyes.

Jay looked at the closed door, then turned away. “I could almost stay here. Almost . . .”

HE SPENT the rest of the afternoon at the staging area, inspecting the maintenance work and loading of *Search*. He ate at the nearest cafeteria—the food was passable but he had no urge to refill his plate—and started back toward his quarters. Rain spattered from the darkened sky; gusty wind chilled him. He passed a small, noisy bar, then turned and entered it to wait out a sudden squall. After one drink, taken slowly, the loudness drove him out again. He bought a small bottle to take along.

Back at quarters he sipped the spirits, over ice, while he watched an entertainment channel. Soon bored, and fatigued from his restless night when he had last slept, he showered and went to bed.

“ . . . rather late,” Raelle had said. Without rest he’d be in no condition to cope with whatever he had to face. He dozed.

A METALLIC SOUND first roused him; then a knock brought him fully awake. *Raelle!*—had he, from habit, thrown the bolt? Probably . . . He fumbled at the bedside lamp and by its dim light got up, blinking, his eyes unwilling to focus.

He reached the door, opened it. Sudden glare from the corridor made

him close his eyes but first he glimpsed Raelle's smile—and saw that she was wearing unfamiliar garb, some kind of orange smock. No matter—blindly he caught and held her, kissed her, felt her hair brush his hand against her back. . . .

Long hair? A wig? He stepped back, squinting against sudden illumination from the overhead light. Raelle, yes—and the hair was her own, no wig. She looked behind her and said, "This is your Monogamist? You didn't tell me he was a nudist, too."

Jay looked past her—to another Raelle, shorthaired and wearing ship's clothing, the familiar green. This one laughed. "Surprised, Jay?"

He shook his head, hard. "I'd better put on a robe." As he began to turn away, the Raelle he knew came to him and kissed him thoroughly.

Then, "Get dressed if you want to. Rae won't mind, either way."

He robed himself anyway and sat on the bed, greenclad Raelle beside him and the other in a chair, facing. Neither spoke; after a moment he said, "Would anyone like to tell me anything?"

Beside him the woman nodded. "Rae—that's her nickname—she's the me of *this* Earth. And to find her—that's why I came through Drift."

"Yourself? And she's who you've been with?"

Rae spoke. "That's right. I told her she should let you know. I hope you haven't worried too much—Jay, is it?" She chuckled. "You greeted me nicely, but we still haven't been introduced."

He ignored the social ploy. "I worried, yes. I'm still worried."

Raelle touched his shoulder. "What about, Jay?"

He couldn't answer yet; he knew

too little. He looked at Rae. "And why are *you* going Courier?"

"Same reason. Raelle beat me to it, is all."

Narcissism? It didn't fit. "I don't understand."

"Let me tell it," said Rae. "I don't have the personal involvement with you, to maybe embarrass me—and we're both the same."

She breathed deeply. "I have no family—you know that—I grew up in a Child Care Center. Nice people—no complaints—but no closeness, either. All that time, my best friends were two girls my own age. Have you ever known identical twins, really well?"

"No—hardly at all."

"Then you can't know how it feels—your very best friends, always so much closer to each other than to you. Not even needing to talk, half the time, to know what the other was thinking."

"Oh, they tried to include me, they really did—but they were such a part of each other, all I could have was their leavings. It was this rapport they had, you see. That I'd never known—and never could!"

"And I *wanted* it so," said Raelle. "So badly, for so long, that when I understood what the Courier program meant I dumped a reasonably good life, just to seek what *they* had. Because there couldn't be anyone else, Jay—it had to be me, myself—or no one."

"My only difference," said Rae, "is that it took me longer, to decide."

He felt his face go blank, taut. "And you both found what you wanted." From his shoulders, aching muscles pulled at his neck. "All right. I can't ask you to give up something you needed that badly—so I won't." He shook his head. "I suppose you'll

ship out together?" The calm evenness of his voice amazed him; he wanted to scream, wail, sob, shout, smash something.

"Oh, Jay!" Raelle turned to hug him. Well, gratitude was better than nothing. She said, "You thought—?" She shook her head. "What I—we—needed was the closeness, the instant knowing of each other, that came because we're the same. And—" "And I'm not. Yes, I know. I—"

"But that's it, you see. Jay—we've had that; we'll never lose it. But you're *not* me—so to know you, I'll need you with me all my life!"

Rae smiled at them. Before Jay could speak, she said, "That ache's gone—even if we never meet other selves again, and we might, at that. Because now, you see, we *know*."

Jay went to her. "This time I'm kissing you on purpose."

When he stopped, she said, "But that's all, isn't it? Raelle told me."

"Yes. But right now I wish I were twins."

She laughed. "You're not, though. Well, on another Earth, maybe. . . ." She looked at her watch. "Tomorrow it's up early, for boarding. Raelle's told me why I need a haircut first." She squeezed Jay's hand. "My Can's named *Quest*—maybe I should rename it, but I don't think I will; there's always something more to look for, isn't there?"

The two women embraced. Above their smiles, tears welled but did not flow.

"JAY? You really thought I could leave you?"

"I didn't *know*—" He told her what he had thought, what he and Saela had said. Thinking that Saela deserved to know the outcome; tomorrow he'd call her. . . . Raelle hugged him.

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Then he told of his meeting with Harwood and Glenna Pearsall.

"Why, Jay—that's wonderful! And we *will* see them, won't we?"

"Sure. It'll be lots better, everything out in the open. And you'll like Woody."

"I expect to." She paused, her dark gaze meeting his. "It's tomorrow, the admiral wants our yes or no?" He nodded. "And it's yes, Jay, isn't it?"

"Well, we can't keep those small but vital components waiting. Nobody Home, here we come!"

Now he could shrug his tensions loose. "Come to think of it, I could use a yes, myself."

He got it.

—F. M. BUSBY

EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT

Linda Isaacs made her debut in this magazine with "Fully Automated, With Low Down Payment" (July, 1975). Like that one, this story deals with a house and the person who lives in it and the domestic applications of technology . . . but the person, the problem and the outcome are not at all the same. . . .

LINDA ISAACS

I WOULD NEVER have guessed that she was an android if she hadn't told me. Her hair was the same brownish gold as taffy apples, and her skin—so naturally flawless—was warm and delicate.

"You ordered me from Hoover's Androids," she said, her voice perfect like all the rest of her. She just stood there at the door, the wind pulling little strands of hair across her face and caressing her soft green dress.

"Come in." I stepped aside, watching the smooth curve of her legs as she walked into the living room. She went over to the couch and turned around.

For the life of me, I couldn't figure out why they'd sent a female psychotherapist. "I'm Lester Wills," I said, and my face went hot.

"I'm glad to know you, Mr. Wills," she said reaching into her pocket. She pulled out a casset and handed it to me. "Here are the instructions. After you review them, I'm ready to start when you are." She smiled and watched me with big, dark eyes.

I threw the tape onto the endtable next to some headphones and motioned her to sit. She surveyed the overstuffed white couch and then sat down slowly.

"Do you have a name?" I asked, smoothing my hair and sitting at the other end of the couch.

She looked at me carefully, obviously noting my bald spot and over-long nose. She probably didn't like the fact that I wore glasses either.

"I have one, but you can call me anything you like," she said. Her glance slid across the sculpted green rug. "I can program it in."

"What's your name?" I asked, reaching into my pocket for cigarettes. I offered her one, but she shook her head.

"You can call me Mitzi or Miss Dubeau," she said, watching me work the silver table lighter.

I studied her a moment, trying to fathom why Hoover's Androids would name a psychotherapist Mitzi Dubeau. Obviously it was to put me at ease—but should I be at that much ease? I stubbed out the cigaret.

"Well, I'll listen to the instructions and we can begin," I said, slipping the tape into the slot in the endtable. There was a click as I put on the headphones and waited.

The tape hissed and muttered, but I couldn't make out a word. A good two minutes of it whirled by and at last I took off the phones and turned

to her. "You must have brushed by the door magnet," I said shrugging. "I'll have them send another. We can start anyway, can't we?"

She looked around the room. "I suppose so," she said. "What shall I do first?"

"Well it's like this," I said, forcing out the words, "I can't talk to women very well. I know you're going to laugh at this, but I'm even having trouble talking to you." There was a long silence, and at last I looked into her face.

She was smiling sympathetically and leaning toward me a little. "It's all right, Mr. Wills. You're leasing me for two weeks—there's plenty of time."

"Call me Les," I said and looked with pretended interest at the library of tapes which covered the wall facing the couch. I surveyed the tapes for several minutes, but all the while I was thinking of her smooth and perfect face and her smooth and perfect body.

"I never was one to speak right out," I murmured. "At school they marked me down for never participating. Not that I'm stupid," I added quickly. "I was in the top percentage, and now I'm a registered RPA."

I glanced toward her, my eyes hesitating just below her shoulders. When I got to her face, she wasn't looking at me. She seemed to be noting the stacks of magazines along the walls and then searching upward as if for cobwebs.

"Don't you see," I said a little angrily. "Women date me once and then drop me like a hot potato. It's almost as if the ones I've dated have gone and told all the others. I'd have to leave town to get a fresh start."

I sat forward, looking over at her and my sweaty shirt made a ripping sound as it pulled away from the

vinyl. My hands were shaking a little so I folded them.

"Well," she said brightly, "let's go look at the kitchen." She stood up and waited for me.

"The kitchen?" I asked. Well, psychiatry is practiced in many ways, and apparently the latest technique, guaranteed by Hoover's, included a survey of the patient's kitchen. Perhaps the kitchen revealed something deep and basic about one's personality.

I led the way through the narrow hallway to the kitchen. It's a big yellow room with ochre appliances and when you go in, it's like diving into a pool of liquid yellow.

"Very nice," Mitzi said, running her finger along the yellow porcelain sink. She caught sight of some used dishes and began to put them into the compacter.

"You don't have to do that," I said in confusion.

Mitzi smiled knowingly. "Yes I do. Now you just sit down and tell me anything specific you can think of."

I stumbled backward to one of the slick yellow kitchen chairs and sat down. Obviously, I thought, a new technique. Treat the patient like family and he will respond like family. I was impressed.

I watched her put things carefully into the shiny yellow cabinets and then clean the counters.

"I loved this girl once," I said, polishing my wire-rimmed glasses on my shirt. "She was a virgin and all, so I could have married her, but she made these intimations. It was wrong—I told her it was wrong. But she said if we loved each other, it was okay. But I know right and wrong."

Mitzi turned toward me. "Your floor could use washing," she said going over to the washer control. "Lift your feet."

I lifted my feet and watched in amazement as she flood cleaned the gold speckled floor.

"Why are you doing this!" I demanded and jumped up, taking her by the hand.

She turned from the control, but did not attempt to pull her hand away from me. "One of my prime directives, Les, is that cleanliness is next to godliness."

I stared into her dark brown eyes and a certain shock passed through me as I realized I was holding her hand. "That's precisely how I feel," I said in surprise. "It makes me confident to know you believe that too."

"Certainly," Mitzi, searching about the room for something. "Let's go into the dining room."

We went out the east door of the kitchen into the little dining room with the window wall. The ornate glass table was smudged with fingerprints and Mitzi, who seemed to produce a dustcloth from nowhere, began to polish the table.

"The girls I know aren't as industrious as you," I said as she dusted the light fixtures. "It's so easy to talk to you—I feel a lot better."

She folded her cloth and then glanced out the window. Dusk had fallen leaving the sky in faint transition between pink and blue. Purpled trees posed like sculptures and dim footlights had illuminated on the moving way.

"It's beautiful here," I said looking around at the glass-fronted cases opposite the window. My sculpture collection, mostly white marble, was tinted blue and violet by the evening light.

"Every night after dinner I sit here and read journals. Actually, as the years go by I . . ."

"I know how you feel," Mitzi said. "At dusk detail becomes hidden. Ev-

erything looks so simple and orderly, like finished work."

The dustcloth had vanished and she held a buffer in her hand.

I did a double take on the buffer, but decided to ignore it. "That's how my work is, Mitzi—columns of figures sent in from the field, all to be checked and corrected. In my ten years with Phonovision, not a single error has gotten by me. It's probably because each day is like the next, and I'm used to what I have to look for."

She buffed the window with delicate, sweeping movements of her hand, and then turned to me. "You are unlike the others," she said. And there was a hint of admiration in her voice.

I traced the outline of her body against the darkened window, noting that the buffer was gone. "And you, Mitzi, are unlike other women."

She looked straight into my eyes. "I'm not a woman, Les: I'm a finely tuned instrument which will last almost indefinitely, if given proper care." Suddenly she stiffened. "It's eight o'clock," she said.

I looked at my watch, and she was right—it was precisely eight o'clock. "How did you know that?" I asked—both her wrists were bare.

"I'm programed to shut off at eight o'clock—the battery pacs have to rest. Where would you like to store me?"

I shrugged. "Right where you are is fine. Do you . . . ?"

But it was too late. She stood beside the table like a store manequin, stiff and still.

"Goodnight," I whispered. Her features were brushed with purple and indigo.

It was a long night. I'd never had a girl in the house overnight before, and somehow it gave me all kinds of crazy dreams. I woke up several times and just lay there thinking Mitzi was

going to cure me—I could feel it. After all, it was ridiculous at thirty to be afraid of women.

MORNING cast a glaring light through the tiny slits in the blind, and I awoke with a start. The bedroom looked the same as it always had, the white bubble furniture, the metallic blind of arc-shaped louvers. Yet somehow everything was different. Familiar things—like the clothes thrown across the easy chair by the door, the metal sculptures on the wall—seemed new and sparkling.

I bounded out of bed and pulled on my yesterday's clothes. It was only eight-thirty in the morning, so there was really no reason to rush. But I had to—I knew everything was going to be all right.

I thudded down the carpeted stairs at a full gallop and nearly collided with Mitzi as she came into the living room.

"Breakfast is ready," she said stepping to one side as I stumbled by her to a halt. Her dark eyes studied me, analyzed, seemed to categorize all my problems.

"I don't eat breakfast," I said, "until about eleven when I go to work."

"Oh," she said simply. "Well, what shall I do?"

I breathed hard for a moment, but made myself stop. The living room, I noticed, was newly cleaned and all the magazines had been put into the racks. Even the walls had been wiped spotless. "Mitzi," I said, noting the cupid bow of her lips, "about my analysis. . ."

Mitzi smiled assent. "About the bedroom . . ."

"Of course," I said. "You can tell a lot by a person's bedroom."

We went upstairs and I opened the door to my room. She checked the corners of the room, pushed the

airbed slightly with her foot and then circled the room twice. But nothing was out of place. She went to the closet and threw open the doors.

"How," I asked, "can I be able to talk to other women like I am to you?"

Mitzi started into the closet. "I'll get your clothes cleaned," she said meaningfully. Her dark-lashed eyes caressed me.

Of course she was right. I've been so busy with my job that I never took much note of my clothes. It would be a fresh start for me—I might even get a whole set of new suits.

"Mitzi," I said, coming up close behind her, "you're doing a fine job." She was surprisingly light as I turned her around and kissed her full on the lips. She was soft and yielding as I put my arms around her. A long time seemed to pass and at last I ceased to kiss her.

"Les," she said, her eyes locked into mine, "you have the wrong model if . . ."

"I know," I patted her understandingly and stepped back. "You're not that kind of girl. I admire you for that."

She blinked downward in what might have been a blush, although her face did not change. "I do the best I can, and in this case it isn't easy because you haven't heard the instructions. Sometimes I wonder if we're communicating."

"We're definitely communicating," I said. "You're doing just fine."

She was about to speak when the door chimes echoed up the stairs.

"You stay here," I said. "I'll be right back."

I ran down the stairs and turned the corner to the front door. The identoplate by the knob showed it was a registered salesman, so I opened up, and the outside light daz-

(cont. on page 130)

THE HARDSHIP POST

This is Tom Goodhue's first published story. Tom comes to us by way of our former Clubhouse columnist, John D. Berry, whose long-time friend he is. After reading this story I think you'll agree with me that Goodhue has a new career cut out for him. . . .

TOM GOODHUE

THE RACON perked her ears to better catch the distant sound. A very large animal! Perhaps a human, she comforted herself, and they only come near here in large but unthreatening groups. But the sound grew louder and she could tell that it was something furiously crashing through the woods, now coming up the creekbed. The racoon ran for cover.

"Spanish moss!" the man shouted. "That's it! Spanish moss! I had it once at Scout camp near here. Water. Boil it in water. That's it! You boil it in water! Like mashed potatoes they said. It grows on the rocks they said. Yes . . . it grows on rocks. Just like green mashed potatoes."

Scrambling through the woods in search of Spanish moss, Robert Queller ripped his pants on a jagged rock and didn't even care. Memories of Scout camp and the colony at Syrtis Major merged together as he sprinted up the creekbed. As he slipped and splashed into the mud he remembered the rainfall at Camp Rokili the first night he had ever pitched a tent. He remembered how he had worked the dry red soil into a mud plaster and packed it around the base of his home on Mars in order to give it added insulation. Day by day the sharp, angular, metallic surface be-

came muted and rounded by the red mud. His superiors back on Earth wondered what he was doing all day and chewed him out when he forgot to make a scheduled transmission. The others in the colony looked upon his mud-playing with amusement at first, teasing him a little about this "regression," then wondered if this frivolity was worth all the precious water Queller was using, but eventually saw the sense in this added insulation. Soon they were all out together slopping on the wet mud.

They were good neighbors, he sighed. Better than any here. They had taught him to enjoy the arid planet as much as possible. They taught him to cook and season the native lichen. He had even taken quite a fancy to it and had learned which areas yielded the tastiest lichen.

They knew how to send a person off, too. Warmest farewell he'd ever had, he told himself. Each person in the small colony had invited him over for dinner before he left. He remembered the handshakes and the hugs. "Congratulations," most said. "We envy you." "Lucky stiff." "What I'd give to get away from here."

Was he glad to be returning? Maybe. Old acquaintances to see again, the bright lights, things to do. Parties, window shopping, the video

collection at the L. A. Public Library. The morning paper—something he really missed during his two years on Mars. No more dust storms! Yet there was so much sadness in the desperate grip of those parting handshakes.

CHIEF ENGINEER Maureen Johnson welcomed Queller into her home for the last time. "Good thing you're leaving tonight," she said, staring out the window. "We're going to have a helluva dust storm tomorrow."

"Guess you will . . . I sure won't miss this wind any."

"The storm's supposed to last at least three days. Don't know what I'll do to keep from going crazy. Won't be able to work on the new antenna. Probably won't even be able to get outside. Won't—" she broke off, seeing that his eyes were wandering. He slowly surveyed the living room, trying to get a last image that he could fix firmly in his mind. The soft, round chairs, the teapot he made for her from clay on the banks of a "canal" in Isidis Regio, the low table where his hand had hovered before touching her shoulder for the first time, the wide window through which they had watch so many sunsets. They sat and watched one last sunset together.

Paul and Miriam Mbonu came by later to say goodby to Robert. Paul brought a mural which the children in his class had painted as a going-away present. "Gonna miss you," Paul said, squeezing his arm. Maureen handed Queller another present: a clay teapot, a mate to the one she had received from him. Queller's eyes misted over and the group closed around him in an embrace.

THE TAKE-OFF was a quick, wrenching end to the slow, agonizing process of unravelling connections. It was a

welcome relief.

The trip to Earth was filled with lingering memories and eager anticipations as the ship sped through the interplanetary limbo which separated the two parts of his life. Funny how you can move so fast and feel like you are hanging suspended.

And the return! The debriefing and doctoring, the short quarantine and examination, more debriefing and more doctoring until he felt thoroughly picked over. And each hour he met more people than he had known in the previous two years. A week of conferring in Canberra. The shuttle from Canberra to Washington—once again sitting still while moving so fast. Then off to Osaka on another shuttle for more meetings. Finally back to Los Angeles. During the flight the steward brought him a pineapple with lunch; Queller hardly knew what to do with it—couldn't even remember what it was at first.

The Agency found him a nice living-module near Los Angeles. Saw to it that he was invited to state dinners. Saw that a short item about his return appeared in the *Times*. Assigned him a Return Liaison Officer who had worked with others Mars returnees and had even visited Syrtis Major twice. Queller was impressed with how well the Agency looked after him.

"Readjust can be hard, Bob," the R. L. O. told him. "Keep busy now. That's the main thing to do." The Agency saw that he kept busy, that was certain. As if there was not enough to do with filling out reports, unpacking, retrieving his belongings from storage, buying a vehicle, and all that, the Agency made sure that his social life was full. Full enough that he had very little time for nesting.

He first became aware of the difficulty of settling-in while trying to hang a large 3-D in his living room.

"Bob," the R. L. O. protested, laying the burden down, "*where* do you want this thing? My arms are ready to give out. I've held it in every possible position on every available wall. Don't you like *any* of them?"

"I'm sorry, but nowhere has seemed right so far."

"Maybe you just don't like the picture. I don't like any of this junk they put out these days. Why I saw a statue the other day that—"

"I like it. I like it very much. It's not the picture, it's something else."

"Maybe it's the color of the walls."

"No, same color as my living room in Syrtis. Probably the same color as half the walls in this city. Even the texture's the same. Same kind of material we had at Syrtis . . . That's it! It's not the same. The color's the same, the texture's the same but it's *not* the same wall. This just isn't home."

"Aw come on, Bob! This is a great place. What do you want us to do, fly the colony back with you when your tour is up?" They laughed together about that and chatted a bit longer before finally hanging the 3-D. After the R. L. O. left he noted in his report that Queller needed careful observation.

The R. L. O. resolved, also, to give Queller special attention. Queller's social life moved rapidly from full to full tilt. And the whirl of dances and parties and dinners was indeed fun. It was weeks before he even had the time to wonder if he missed Mars. When the idea was suggested by his R. L. O. he dismissed it with a snicker. Mars? Syrtis? How could you miss a place like that? Yet he soon realized he did miss Syrtis, at least

the people at the colony. The Agency expected this, of course, and tried to ease the pains of transition in every way possible. They even gave him a large, two-sense coffee-table book with photographs, drawings, and tactile tiles of Mars. Queller returned home from work one day to find it and a gift card. He quickly carried it into the living room, held the book closed for a few minutes, then slowly, gingerly turned the pages. A photograph of the norther hemisphere taken from Phobos. A drawing of the southern ice cap. Then a tactile of a "canal" bank. Queller closed his eyes, ran his fingertips across the page, and almost cried.

It was difficult to talk about Mars, yet every few days a new invitation landed on his desk, asking him to address a group somewhere about places they had never been before. Seven weeks after his return, Queller spoke to a group of Agency recruits.

He had been looking forward to this speech more than others. At least there was some chance that some of these people would actually go to Mars, perhaps one even to Syrtis. He tried to begin in a businesslike manner, sticking to the facts, warning them about the difficulties of colony life, but as he spoke the harshness of life on Mars blurred and the faces of people at Syrtis Major sharpened. He tried to pull himself together, mumbled something about soil composition, completely lost his train of thought and asked the projectionist to begin the slides. He tried to field their questions about temperature and wind velocity but kept coming back to faces and desperate handshakes and never really answered the questions.

As Queller returned home that day to his living module, he noticed that the door was ajar. "Damn door latch.

Can't even build one that'll keep the door shut anymore." But he found the latch to be in working order. Then he found that his video-deck, game console, TV, turntable, amplifier, and speakers were missing, along with a not-quite random assortment of his other belongings. He worked his way through one room at a time, putting things back in place and tallying the loss. He was doing well at keeping a stiff upper lip until he got to the living room and discovered that the two-sense book was gone.

He had lunch with his R. L. O. the next day and mentioned the burglary, saying how vulnerable it made him feel. The R. L. O. said the Agency would try to help out, then chided Queller for not locking the door. "You have an ID card, you know. Use it!"

"But I'm just not used to locking doors."

"Better get used to it."

"But I hate locking doors. I haven't locked a door in over two years."

"You're kidding."

"No, I never locked my home or my vehicle the whole time I was at the Syrtis station."

"You mean with all that equipment there, you'd just go off and leave it unlocked? Just like that? What about the regulations?"

"Screw the regulations! I once made a week-long trip out to the new colony at Sabaenus Sinus and not a thing was touched."

"Well, I'll be . . . Well, look here, you trusting soul, you're not on Mars anymore. You'd better be more careful from now on."

QUELLER spent the next few days replacing stolen possessions, collecting what insurance he could, and trying to get used to the idea of locking the door. It didn't work. Somehow he

couldn't really replace the things that had been stolen, not even with identical items. Performing the standard security procedures bothered him, yet he also woke up several times in the middle of the night wondering if he had remembered to lock the front door. He slept fitfully and every unfamiliar noise sent a shiver up his spine.

He almost forgot his birthday altogether. No, he wanted to forget it. He did not want to remember his birthday party last year at Syrtis, and he did not want to worry about whether or not anyone would remember that this day was his birthday. It wasn't until the day before his birthday that the memories and worries got to him. The memories were not as bad as he had expected—they were actually quite nice—but he was so consumed by the fear that no one would remember his birthday that he could not get anything done at work. There had been a card from his parents, of course, but you expect your parents to remember your birthday—he really wanted someone else to notice, too. A woman from work, someone he had thought was attracted to him and was definitely attractive to him, called after he got home on his birthday to ask him over for dinner in a week. He wished that he could have somehow told her days ago that this day was his birthday. He slowly sank into depression as he fixed some food.

Only the Agency came through. A courier arrived after dinner with a small package. The good old Space Agency, he said to himself as he opened the package. Thank God for their computer. At least someone there had the compassion to program birthday gifts. He found four ounces of lichen from Crocea, the best. He

ate the lichen that evening all alone in a dark room with only two candles lit, as if eating it were some kind of sacred ritual. The lichen brought back a flood of memories and feelings. He cried uncontrollably, paced back and forth through the living room, and tried—unsuccessfully—to drink himself to sleep. He tossed and turned fitfully. He awoke a few hours later in a cold sweat, threw some clothes on, and raced down to his vehicle.

AND NOW he was scrambling up a creekbed in the San Bernardino Mountains, searching in the moonlight for a plant last seen on a Boy Scout camping trip at age twelve. Looking especially for big, grey rocks. Grey, was that the right color? What kind of rocks did he want anyway? Granite? What do they look like anyway? This one here? Or this? Or this? He raced faster and faster, peering behind boulder after boulder, finally finding the moss, rubbing his palms against it, smelling it, rubbing his nose in it, falling back with an enormous grin.

He dropped the pot, pulled rocks together in a circle, emptied his pockets in search of paper, found twigs and sticks nearby, built and kindled a fire. He scraped mounds of moss into the pot with his knife, scooped up water from the creek, settled the pot on the fire, and sat down to wait for the moss to cook.

After a few minutes of sitting patiently he noticed the scattered contents of his pockets: his Agency card,

his ID card, pens, an unopened letter, a comb. He poked through the debris, then opened the envelope. It was an invitation from the Space Agency Wives' Association to speak on "Base Life in a Hostile Environment". He laughed and it felt good. He roared with laughter; he doubled over with laughter; he rolled on the ground with laughter.

TWO PARK maintenance officers rushed to the scene of the fire and found Queller in a clearing. He was naked, grovelling in the dirt beside the fire, lapping up moss from a bucket, rubbing the moss on his chest. The green gruel dribbled out of his mouth as he hummed a children's song.

"Disgusting," whispered one of the park officers as he stood back in the woods about fifteen meters from Queller.

"Better get him to an Adjustment Center."

"Yeah, better put him out, too—he might be dangerous."

"Good idea—he has a knife."

"Do you think 50 mg. of dorital should be enough? I'm not used to shooting humans with this thing."

"Ought to be. But you better get him with the first shot. Might anger him if you miss."

The park maintenance officer rested the barrel of his dart gun on a rock, aimed carefully, and pulled the trigger.

—TOM GOODHUE

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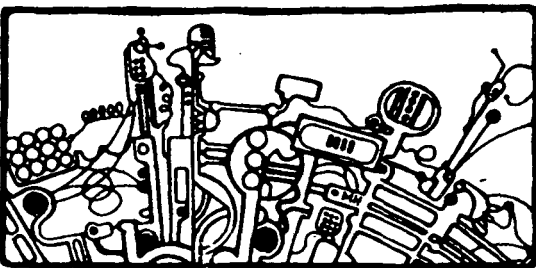
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the Science

GREG BENFORD

...in Science Fiction



Talking to Aliens (Part 2)

IN *The Listeners*, a novel by James Gunn, astronomers receive a coded radio message from the stars, after decades of searching. They quickly decode it and the plot moves forward to an intriguing conclusion.

But—is the process that easy? We'll never know for sure until it happens, of course, but it's entertaining to make some dry runs.

Any alien creatures broadcasting a powerful radio wave out into our vast galaxy know they are missionaries. Their targets—other civilizations capable of listening and answering—are at least several tens of light years away, by all odds. Individual stars are, on the average, 3 or 4 light years apart. Unless each star has planets, and those planets thrive with intelligent, machine-building lifeforms, then civilizations are quite distant from each other.

Even if someone hears the signal, and responds instantly, the time delays involved because of the finite speed of light (and radio) are large—decades, maybe centuries.

So two-way conversation is very slow. But a lot of information can be sent before a reply comes. It's like corresponding with a friend in a remote Mongolian village—the mails are slow, letters take half a year, so you write him a substantial note, not

just a paragraph or two.

The first interstellar message, then, should be simple and yet contain as much information as possible. The Dutch astronomer von Hoerner suggests that the first message, after preliminaries are finished, should contain all information which might extend the recipient society's lifetime. This would increase the probability that two-way contact can go on for a long time.

Establishing a language between cultures with different minds, bodies, and environment is not a simple task. It must begin with the building of a mutual code. The things we have in common are the basic facts of the physical universe and mathematics which enabled us to build our radios in the first place. There are undoubtedly many kinds of intelligence, many of them so strange we will have no common ground. We still don't know if the dolphins and whales of our own oceans are intelligent, or why they have such complex languages. But hopefully the act of producing technology—radio—makes some part of an alien mind understandable to us.

You can't understand electromagnetism without knowing how to count, so suppose we start there. A few simple symbols might be sent at

first, for example

$$1 + 1 = 2$$

$$2 + 2 = 4$$

With . . for +, - . for =, - for one and - - for 2, and so on, we could set up a simple arithmetic language. After some thought, though, many scientists feel that a far higher information content can be obtained by using pictures, not simple word symbols. To be sure, a basic word language will be useful in the long run, but a picture might be the quickest way to convey a lot of information in the first part of the message. The first signal should probably run through a long cycle, taking months or years before repeating itself. A picture at the beginning of this cycle would settle questions and provide clues for understanding the more tedious word portions to follow.

Stanford University's Bernard Oliver constructed a hypothetical message from Epsilon Eridani (a star like our own, 10.8 light years away) made up of pulses and spaces. There is a basic pulse ("on") space and a separation ("off") space. By writing ones for the pulses and zeroes for the blanks Oliver arrived at the figure. In all there are 1,271 entries. This is an interesting number because it is the product of 31 and 41, both of which are prime—that is, can't be divided by any other number with no fraction left over. This fact, says Oliver, "strongly suggests that we arrange the message in a 31 by 41 array." This done, we get a two dimensional picture:

Noticing the figures in the lower half of the picture, Oliver says "apparently we are in touch with a race of erect bipeds who reproduce sexually. There is even a suggestion that they might be mammals. The crude circle and column of dots at the left suggest

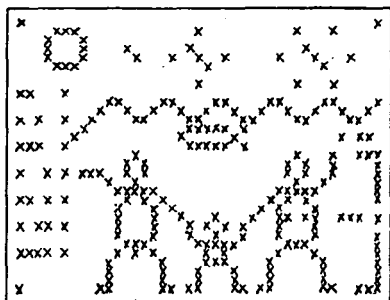


FIGURE 1

their sun and planetary system. The figure is pointing to the fourth planet, evidently their home. The planets are numbered down the left hand edge in a binary code which increases in place value from left to right and starts with a decimal (or rather a binary) point to mark the beginning.

"The wavy line commencing at the third planet indicates that it is covered with water and the fishlike form shows there is marine life there. The bipeds know this, so they must have space travel. . . . The binary number six above the raised arm of the right figure suggests six fingers and implies a base-12 number system. The dimension line at the lower right suggests that the figure is 11 somethings tall."

The vertical column of dots is as tall as the beings themselves and at the center of the column is printed the binary symbol for 11. This hypothetical message was received on a radio wavelength of 21 centimeters—the wavelength of the hydrogen line. This is the only length both civilizations know in common at the beginning of the message, so we conclude the creatures are $11 \times 21 = 231$ centimeters tall, or about 7 ft. Finally, the top line of symbols to the right of the star represent basic elements. The nucleus appears as a dot, surrounded by other

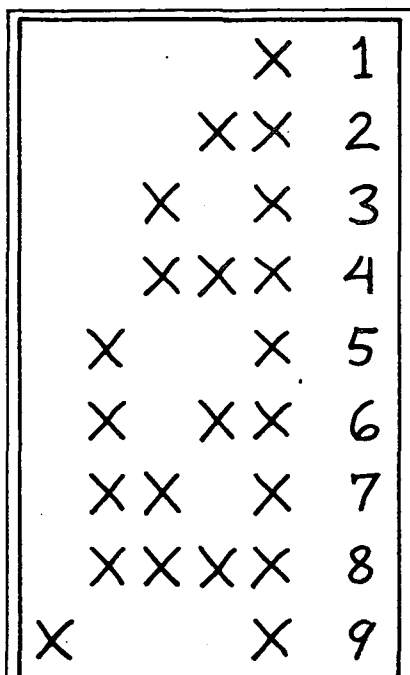


FIGURE 2

Binary notation for the numbers depends on the position of the dots. No specific symbols (4,5,6, etc.) are used—only dots are needed. This system is convenient for counting in computers and for use in simple radio messages.

dots representing electrons. The first symbol of two dots is hydrogen, the next carbon (nucleus plus 6 electrons) and the next oxygen (nucleus plus 8 electrons). The bipeds have a carbonate chemistry. (The array also has a dot at each corner, to define its outlines.)

This message is not very different from one we could send ourselves. It carries information about the basic physics and chemistry of life quite similar to our own. It is difficult to

know whether anyone else would interpret the wavy line with a fish beneath it the way we would though. Oliver's message might be more representative of the diversity we should expect if we changed some of its elements.

For example, this next figure shows a message received from a centaur-like being with four legs, a long tail, two arms, and a large flattened head. He is pointing with his hand at the third and fourth planets in a five planet system. Looking at the planets alone, we see that the third and fourth are larger than the others. There are dots beside planets 2, 3 and 4 and none beside planets one and five. These dots are not a binary notation, probably—the best guess might be that these are the moons of the

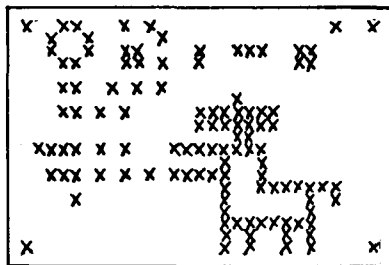


FIGURE 3

planets. It is interesting and perhaps significant that the moons are shown closer to the centaur than the planets. Perhaps the centaur is indicating that he comes from a moon, not a planet. If this system is similar to ours, the largest planets are gas giants. We might expect their moons to be rather sizeable, as those of Jupiter and Saturn are. Since the centaur points to two groupings of moons, probably he has developed interplanetary travel and has colonized at least one other moon. He must be a creature significantly different from ourselves.

AMAZING

The chemistry in the upper portion of the message is also different. The first symbol shows four dots close together, surrounded by seven other dots spread out. If the four dots represent a nucleus, there are seven electrons circling it. This could mean the element nitrogen. The next symbol to the right is ambiguous; it is not a binary notation for a number. However, the next symbol could be binary notation for three. The next symbol to the right is another nucleus (four dots close together) with a single point outside. The element with one electron is the most common one, hydrogen. We then have the equation

$N \ ? \ 3 \ H$

a common chemical equation is

$N \ H_3$ (ammonia)

if this is ammonia, the second sign to the right must be a plus. This means the basic element of most importance to the centaur is ammonia. Perhaps his moon home is based on ammonia chemistry and ammonia oceans.

We could also imagine that the standard layout of planets might not be given at all in another hypothetical message. Instead, a being might point to a symbol in which twelve dots surround one. If the dot at the center is a star, what are we to make of the larger circle of dots around it? This might be a Dyson sphere—this race has broken up the mass of most of its planets and redistributed the matter around its parent star, to absorb all the star's light for power generation. In this case, we should study the target star for enhanced infra-red emission. This society could be quite an old one which has already passed the limit of its easily accessible resources and possesses highly sophisticated technology. We would have much to learn from them.

Even a relatively short message, displayed in two dimensions, carries a

great deal of information. This is because the arrangement of symbols itself carries import, when we use simple logic and elementary knowledge to guess the relationship. This is the ideal sort of signal to send, since the fact that we can hear it on our radios already implies we have enough knowledge to understand the clues in the two-dimensional message. Such a two-dimensional technique could be extended to convey much more subtle concepts, to supplement the more lengthy word conversation to follow.

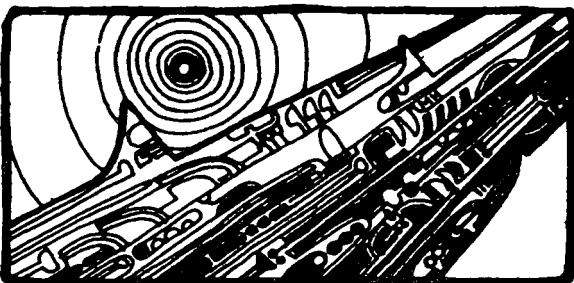
The first message, both in picture and words, might be the only one we receive for a very long time. If at the time of Christ we had answered a message from a civilization 1000 light years away, we would still have a few decades to go before getting a reply. Interstellar communication is slow in the sense that the mails are slow—long delivery times.

But a vast library of information can be sent in a few years, and essentially all the knowledge of the transmitting society could be delivered up to its neighbors. Receipt of such a hoard of knowledge could prolong indefinitely the lifetime of a civilization which had only recently invented the radio. This might give the receiving society enough stability to construct a transmitter, reply in kind and still be stable and functioning when the next signal came from the stars.

The very expectation of another message might prove to be a civilizing influence. Even if it is not, an ambitious and foresighted race could place its transmitters and receivers in orbit above their planet, so that even the destruction of their civilization would not halt the conversation. After all, their society might rise from the ashes again, in dire need of new knowledge and instruction from the stars.

—GREGORY BENFORD

the Future in Books



Afterword to a Novel By Barry N. Malzberg

REVELATIONS, which Avon Equinox will reissue sometime in 1977, was the first novel I wrote (exactly five years ago now) after moving to the house in northwest New Jersey which we still occupy. The opening chapters had been done in Manhattan late in 1970 and the contract secured before the move but because I had a pretty fair idea of what the book was about and where I wanted to go with it I deliberately held off until after the move because, fearful of a block in new premises, I wanted to have before me something on which I had a certainty. (Writers get like that.) After having written something like three dozen novels in Manhattan, the last ten in a stuffy, odorless, clangorous little maid's room with wall to wall heat (described with vindictive accuracy in *Herovit's World*) I was afraid that I would be unable to function in a clean, well-lighted place surrounded by trees and the cries of birds clearing the oil fumes of Ridgefield Park from their little throats.

As it turned out I need not have worried. *Revelations* was written in three weeks and past a slight block which hung me on page 57 (in the original edition) for a time, probably

gave me as little trouble as any novel I wrote through 1974. I went on to write another three dozen amidst trees and asthmatic birds and when a certain narrowing of intensity, revulsion against my work, shattering of facility occurred about a year ago now it had nothing to do with the environment in which I was writing. So in one sense *Revelations* is close to my heart. Whatever its defects it proved to me when I was still (despite my prolificacy and growing reputation in this field) not quite sure of what I was doing that I was working creatively at a level of the most absolute precision.

The publication record of *Revelations* was not, however, so happy. The original publisher has historically had a dismal record with science fiction* and since *Revelations*, like so many of the novels verged on being *sui generis*, it was decided to label the

*Yet dismal record or not that publisher keeps on trying. Hope over experience perhaps or the stubborn feeling that there has to be *something* in this stuff; after all, kids love it so. I have had similar emotions over the years when reapproaching once more Aqueduct and Belmont parks in the counties respectively of Queens and Nassau, New York.

book "mystery-suspense" and deliver it then to that section of the paperback bookstores patronized by more people than might be seeking yet another Crazy Astronaut novel by Malzberg in the science fiction section. Packaged under that label with an impressionistic drawing of a naked woman being dismembered, crucified face behind television screen, and with clever cover line A PARANOID NOVEL OF SUSPENSE, the book sold only a few thousand copies, producing a series of royalty reports so numbing that it was actually reverted on request. It was as if the publisher merely wanted to forget the whole thing, quite an uncharacteristic position for publishers toward what has finally been bought, let me tell you.

What had happened of course is that my novel had been put out on the market as if with diabolical intent to cut it off from *any* audience. My own science fiction readership (the only audience that I had then and still the majority of whatever following I have) would not, except for the most persistent and honor-bound, even find the book, placed as it was two aisles down and near the candy counter . . . and your run-of-the-mine mystery reader would need little more than a fast skim to intimate that whatever he would be getting it was no refreshing two-hour escapist read. Not with all those short chapters, muttering paranoia and moaning sex he wouldn't. Readers looking for short chapters, muttering paranoia and moaning sex might, on the other hand, find that *Revelations* was exactly their ticket, but these people are rarely to be found in bookstores . . . they have enough of what they need in their heads and bless them. Under the circumstances it is a tribute to the nature of the post-

industrial revolution that *Revelations* sold even the few thousand copies conceded.

Its coming reappearance, hence, is clearly the first time that the science fiction readership—you *will* package this as of this time, please gentlemen?—will have ever heard of it. In effect my novel, thanks to the indulgence of Bill von Assen and his friends at Avon, has the opportunity for the first time and years after the fact to reach the audience for which it was intended.

The novel did get to a few people (mostly because I mailed or handed them copies) and received, as they like to say on the Sunday morning after the night before, mixed reviews. James Tiptree, a science fiction writer for whom I have enormous respect, got hold of the novel somewhere and showed up in a science fiction fan magazine calling it a little unpolished all right, a little overextended, but essentially a great forgotten novel by a writer so prolific that many novels of his would inevitably be lost. (Did the man say 'all of them'?) On the other hand, my close friend and collaborator Bill Pronzini thinks that *Revelations* is somewhere at the bottom of my *oeuvre* being overwrought, over-written and hysterical and the hysteria being not contained in the character; more the writer's in short.

Ben Sano, an intelligent man and member of the well-known, long-established and rapidly becoming highly famous Albany State Science Fiction Society told me that he thought it was an okay novel with flaws here and good things there but the long letter from Hurwitz near the end was an absolutely new literary achievement: the depiction of a mind about to go insane but not yet at all there and writing its own diagnosis

and fate. Edith Weiss thinks the novel "brilliant" and proves me "one of the living masters" but Jeffrey M. Wallmann thought it was the work of a man who "needed to be taken away quietly". Go and fight the world.

Never, except for the Tiptree, did I see a review of the novel in any science fiction market and the comments I have quoted with uncharacteristic thoroughness are virtually all I have received. My wife never finished it and my daughters think it a nifty but very strange cover. That about does it.

Me? I am fond of this novel. I enjoyed writing it or at least parts of it (I did not write it as I have written most of my books since late 1970—in terrible pain) and reread it on publication and again now with as much pleasure as I can ever bring to my own work. (A little.) *Revelations* freed me from the fear of a block at what might have been a bad time (one might feel grateful to the first to whom he ever made love for similar reasons) and it also strikes me, *pace* Bill, *pace* Jeff, as being one of my five or at the worst ten most successful novels. *Revelations* is also one of the very few novels I have written about which I might have something to say beyond the text and it is in that spirit that I would like to turn to the book itself now, moving from circumstance to interior rather than interior to circumstance which latter is my more usual fictive method and particularly visible in this novel.

REVELATIONS was written just about midway between *The Falling Astronauts* (2/71) and *Beyond Apollo* (8/71) and shares with them not only certain obsessions and characterizations representative of that period—mad astronauts, sexual dys-

function due to self-conceptualization as a machine, the lone human voice crying through the interstices of the machines in madness or truth as a last expression of the idiosyncratic heart's grief before the darkness and the great engines—but a certain similarity in development as well. In all three novels the protagonist has been emotionally devastated by the failure of an expedition, in all three he is trying to understand the failure so that he may understand himself. The difference among the three novels is, however, at least as crucial: in *Falling Astronauts* the protagonist breaks down only in the last pages, in *Beyond Apollo* he is crazy at the onset of the book. *Revelations*, that transitional work, is equivocal. Hurwitz is mad but then again maybe he is not; he is rather beyond the edge but he is the only character on the dreadful television production who tries to establish emotional links to what is going on: he is the only one who has left a sense of responsibility. On the way toward coming apart, he is trying to save ground on the rail. Ben Sano is no fool.

At one time I thought that *Falling Astronauts* was a first draft of *Beyond Apollo*, that the latter novel was the former darker and more compressed, with almost all *event* drained. State of mind rather than state of being. When I looked over *Revelations* though I understood that it was not quite as simple as that: this novel is a key step on the way from the rather ambitious but narratively clumsy and lumpish *Falling Astronauts* to the fugal interstices of *Beyond Apollo* which is as technically seamless as *Astronauts* is technically flawed. I was in this book beginning to transmute the material and come to grips with it by squeezing out the action, putting in

the pain and density, but I was not quite there yet.

Oddly this may only mean that *Revelations* is the best of the three. *Beyond Apollo* which found an audience and is easily the most commercially successful of my science fiction novels is perhaps too private, too off-putting and cold whereas *Astronauts* even in its best scenes lives for me as little more than a competent attempt at what might have been, with proper editing* a competent commercial novel. It is not fully controlled. *Revelations* may get at the best of the two—the event of *Astronauts*, the rhetoric and dreadful pain of *Apollo*—and in fact may be a terminal treatment of the theme. Perhaps it and not *Apollo* tied off right proper the paranoid astronaut, the terrible stricture of NASA which so obsessed me from the years 1969–71.

(Certainly, after *Beyond Apollo*, I quit. Barring one short story, “Notes Leading Down to the Disaster,” in April, 1972 I never touched the theme again. I work my obsessions over endlessly but only to a point and when I am done with them I am done. . . . I have not written about horse racing, for instance, since the summer of 1970 or of institutionalized, programmed sex since early 1974. So there is hope for some new material by the eighties, friends.)

At the time I first tied into this theme, just about when the Bormann moon-circling, bible-thumping mission ruined my Christmas of 1968, I was the only science fiction writer doing it. Later on there were many of

us but modesty does not forbid from saying that the record clearly shows I was first and that I had found, at the dying end of the sixties and the program one of the last new directions which the rapidly-becoming-decadent field has been able to produce.

THAT DIRECTION, to be explicit, was this: that space exploration by bureaucracy was dehumanizing *not* because space was (because we have never understood what we are; because only in space might we children of the machine find new parameters of the definition of being human) but because of the bureaucracy. The attempt of NASA and the Johnsonnixon administration to make space exploration merely an extension of American industry here and government civil service there struck me as absolutely despicable. Also hopeless.

It was despicable because it was despicable—we can barely claim the right to our own hearts; we cannot claim the cosmos—but more to the point it was hopeless because at least nine-tenths of Americans loathe, fear and utterly disbelieve their government. If space was to be perceived as a product of government agency then it was only a matter of time (how very little time!) before Americans turned from the program in revulsion and the government, finding it no longer useful as entertainment or repression, would similarly abandon it. I saw all of this coming as early as 7/21/69 when Edward Kennedy's Chapquidick was already beginning to crowd the Moon landing on the front page of the *Times* and I was positive when *Apollo 13* was almost lost in transit that I had been right . . . because the reaction of most people I knew to *Apollo 13* was that the disaster had been rigged, by NASA and by

*Not Terry Carr's fault . . . he commissioned the novel on the basis of thirteen pages but was out of Ace well before it was delivered. He never saw it. I don't think anyone at Ace except the typesetter . . . and then just barely . . . ever did.

Nixon, to re-establish public interest in the program. By 1971, Gardner Dozois told me, an announcement at a science fiction convention of all places of yet another Moon landing attracted no interest whatsoever, distracted no one from the masquerade. In the entertainment culture very little holds past twenty-six or at the most thirty-nine weeks.

By 1971 the government had new concerns, like putting every American slightly to the left of Mike Mansfield in jail or in the ground by decade's end, and by 1973, of course, several very funny things had happened to all of us on the way to the resettlement camps.

I saw it all coming. I saw the collapse of the space program, NASA, the Cape and Houston. Even as I saw it I cried out in rage (ah, Jeremiah at three cents a word!) because it was never space exploration against which I had taken a position but merely its capture, in contemporary America, by a repressive government operating through an enormous bureaucracy dead of feeling, laughing at hope. We deserved better than this I thought. We did indeed deserve, would find it necessary to continue outward and inward toward the planets. But the government did not care, understood nothing. By the middle of the seventies they had taken not only large pieces of our past from us, they had taken almost all of our future.

How right I was too in knowing that the structure of the program and its administration would drive many astronauts crazy we have only been intimating in recent years . . . because I *was* right, I knew from the beginning that the men going into these capsules ostensibly as operators, actually as cargo, would be forced to come to terms with the devastating

fact that *they could best serve only by being machinery* and that many of them, sensitive and reflective as I knew them to be, could not deal easily with this. Only years later did we learn of the divorces, breakdowns, lurches into the occult, scattered children, pain, pain . . . but by then of course *Revelations* and *Falling Astronauts* and *Beyond Apollo* were out of print or nearly so and even if they had not been it hardly would have mattered. *How hard it is to face the truth* Ribicoff had cried to Daley from the podium, *how hard, how hard and fuck you kike, motherfucking yid* saith Daley. There is little future in this country in trying to tell the truth for any reason although at the time I was writing these books repression had not quite caught up to sudden rage and I was making a fair living on advances. It all seems a long time ago now.

So does *Revelations*. For a novel of the future (okay, near future) it seems like many science fiction novels to be curiously dated. Science fiction of course was almost never meant to be predictive. It was merely another category of escape literature constructing templates of the present . . . but *More Than Human* or *The Demolished Man* could have been delivered to the editor last Thursday whereas *Canticle for Leibowitz* or *Fahrenheit 451* or *Revelations* seem to be very much of a time, already framed in retrospect when come back to years later.

How nearly quaint all these astronauts, moonshots, endorsement, anguish seems today! I think that I made only one error in the three astronaut books which may turn out to be serious: I knew that the program was doomed but I did not think it would be so soon forgotten, that there

would be so little retrospect of any kind. I knew it was all going down the tube but somehow back then I thought that its participants and certain witnesses might care a little more. They do not, of course. They did not. If I were to rewrite *Revelations* today—I do not see how I could do it—it would be an emotionless book written with far more humor and Monaghan would have felt almost no pain at all. Like his fucking, his dialogues with Marvin Martin would have been beside the point. For fun or for shame in short. But not for pain.

But I am not rewriting. It is five years later and I cannot (and would not) get back to what I was any more than we can return to the dimly-remembered world of the late sixties of which 1971 was simply a pale, weak and final extension. It had been my intent at the time I placed the novel with Equinox to go through it, do some cutting here, a little expansion there, maybe try to take a little of the hysterical edge off. But on due consideration I am not. I am not. Leave it stand. A novel (or at least a seriously-intended novel) may be an attempt at art but it is also a work of documentary, of witness and testimony and becomes its own small piece of sacred ground. *Revelations* shows where my heart and certain fragments of the head too (and the culture) dwelt in 1971. Let it make the record. Let us not cheapen the concept of rediscovery as the whores of the bicentennial commissions have cheapened it by feeling that we must clean up the past to make it work. The founding fathers, some of them, were racists with bad teeth; Malzberg in 1971 as now had his flaws as a writer, as a person. Leave them be.

To know what we have been is to

move at least a little toward knowing what we are . . . and to know what we are is the first step toward becoming human. Which I still take, which I still aver, to matter as nothing else does.

ONE FINAL ANECDOTE, *obiter dicta* but relevant. I mentioned hitting a block on page 57 which block lasted three hours or so (well, I was younger then, just a big, heavy loveable kid with a triple chin; I didn't know what the hell I was doing then or for many years thereafter; the latest block from which I am just beginning to stagger has lasted thirteen months) but bothered me and in the middle of it Robert Silverberg called and returned a favor.

In the summer of 1970 Silverberg had told me over the phone that he had hit a bad point in *Tower of Glass* somewhere around page one twenty, didn't know where to go. "Literary it up, Bob," I said and he said, "My God that's it," and hung up quickly and he told me years later that he had directly done ten pages of stream-of-consciousness which had gotten him past a kink in the plot and had sent him rolling on cheerily toward the not-so-cheering end.* Now, I asked him, what the hell to do with this narrator/protagonist who had brilliant rhetoric but a case of spiritual constipation which was already dragging me down. "How about a perfect Arcadian vision?" said Silverberg. "Have a whole chapter of him imagining a better, an idealized life."

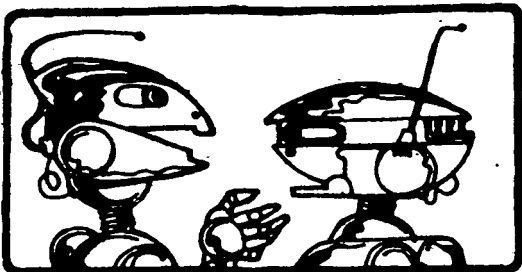
So I said thank you and went away and came back to this very room and wrote Hurwitz-as-prep-schoolteacher

*His "great gong that sounds in the heavens" finishing that novel strikes me yet as the most moving literary image of his work.

(cont. on page 126)

RICH BROWN

the Clubhouse



FANHISTORICA #1, JoeD Siclari, PO Box 1342, Radio City Station, New York, N. Y. 10019. Mimeo, 44pp, 50¢ (the second issue will be larger and hence 75¢), irregular.

MOTA #17, Terry Hughes, 4739 Washington Blvd. (basement), Arlington, Va. 22205. Mimeo, 22pp, 25¢ for sample—no subscriptions, monthly.

KARASS #21, Linda Bushyager, 1614 Evans Ave., Prospect Park, Pa. 19076. Mimeo, 20pp, 3/\$1, monthly.

ALGOL #26, Andrew Porter, PO Box 4175, New York, N. Y. 10017. Offset, 60pp, 6/\$7.50 (checks should be payable to *Algol Magazine*), semi-annually.

OUTWORLDS #27, Bill Bowers, PO Box 2521, North Canton, Ohio 44720. Offset, 44pp, 4/\$5, quarterly.

ALMOST 20 YEARS ago as I write this (and certainly that by the time this gets into print)—in late 1956, anyway—I bought a copy of *AMAZING* for the most fannish of reasons: Egoboo.

"Egoboo" is one of the fan words—possibly one of the least puzzling—you'll occasionally run across in fanzines. It is short for "ego boost" and is used to describe that

heightening of the senses and heady feeling of exhilaration which the True Fan experiences upon seeing his (or her) name in print. Some have compared it to sitting on a whoopee cushion.

There it was.

My name.

In print.

In a professional science fiction magazine!

Not only my name but my address—along with several other peoples—appeared in a 1956 *AMAZING* feature, "The Space Club." It was a listing of people who wanted stf "pen pals".

That issue contained a fanzine review column. (The title of that review column, and its author, escape me at the moment—but I do know it *wasn't The Clubhouse*. This column was first penned much earlier by Rog Phillips, when Ray Palmer was editor, and the title was not revived until Ted White, in more recent times, decided he wanted a fanzine review column in *AMAZING* again.)

I decided, in honor of my first "honest" piece of egoboo (a name like mine frequently gets into print—as a description for maple syrup, chocolate, horse manure, tree bark, and rugs, among other things too dreadful to mention), to find out what these

“fanzines” were all about.

There are those who may tell you that, even after 20 years, I have not succeeded. But foosh on them.

Getting into fandom changed my life as surely as the librarian at the Pasadena Public Library did when she steered me away from the adult section (where I was looking for science books) and into the junior section (where she thrust my first stf book into my hand). (An by the way, thank you, Mrs. Verstigan!)

I was 14 when I sent away for those fanzines, and I was planning one of my own before the first one arrived in my mailbox. As a result of going ahead with my plans, even after finding out that my idea of what a fanzine should be and what fanzines actually were were two different things, I have to report that my earliest fanzines were as bad as any the field has ever seen. Full of typos. Illegible. Inane. Poorly written.

But for all the fact that my first efforts were far from Hugo contenders, they still succeeded in getting me thoroughly involved—some would even say “entrenched”—in the microcosm that is stf fandom. I wrote letters of comment on fanzines, contributed vast quantities of articles, fiction and reviews to (and even sometimes got a few accepted by) other fanzines, joined local and national stf clubs, got into most of fandom’s amateur press associations, and attended regional and world conventions.

I became involved with the people—fans, pros, and a number of individuals who don’t like to be categorized but who fit happily in both categories—who are a part of the little world of science fiction. I became involved with them as *people*, exchanging ideas about science fiction, music, religion, history, ethics, science, art, politics, literature,

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humor, each other, other fans, fandom, sex—ahahaha!—and other subjects.

The 20-year experience has changed and molded me. I have never regretted any part of it.

Eventually, and not without a great deal of effort, I published a few good fanzines and even sold some science fiction. But the way was not easy; I made more than my share of mistakes as I stumbled onto and into the world of fandom.

There’s really nothing wrong with making mistakes, of course; it’s one of the ways we learn things. But it occurs to me, now that I’m on *this* side of the fanzine review column—writing it, that is, instead of reading it and wondering what it’s all about (as you are perhaps doing now, and as I certainly did 20 years ago)—that maybe I can save you from making the same mistakes that I did (so that you can go out and make your own). If I accomplish at least that much, perhaps in 20 years you’ll remember my name—or at least the name of this column.

PERHAPS THE worst thing about neofans is their simple ignorance. Not so much their ignorance of what fandom is—that disappears as they become acquainted with it—but their unnecessary ignorance, which they insist on clinging to, of what fandom has been.

Fandom, you see, is an on-going process; it is not now what it was when I entered it, and it will not be what it is now 20 years hence. Too many new fans try to “invent” the fanzine when, as an artform, it has already been invented; too many new fans jump right into the middle of things with their bold new ideas—which were first heard, tried, and found wanting, in the 1930s.

Although I can’t guarantee that it’s

foolproof, *Fanhistorica* might be of some help to you in this regard: It's a fanzine devoted to detailing what fandom has been, through articles (and reprints) of fan history and by reprinting fine material from the great fanzines of the past. It has a wealth of material to choose from, and in this first issue at least JoeD has chosen wisely.

Fanhistorica is also the source of these recommendations (which I heartily endorse) for those who are interested in learning of fandom's past: *All Our Yesterdays* by Harry Warner Jr. (\$7.50 from Advent: Publishers, Inc., PO Box A3228, Chicago, IL 60690); *The Immortal Storm* by Sam Moscowitz (\$3.50 from Hyperion Press, Inc., 45 Riverside Ave., Westport, Ct. 06880), *The Neofan's Guide to Fandom* (25¢ from Linda Bushyager, address elsewhere), *The Filledstrated Fan Dictionary* (\$1.50 from Elliot Weinstein, 7001 Park Manor Ave., North Hollywood, Ca. 91605), *The Incomplete Burbee* (\$1.50 from Lee & Barry Gold, 2472 Oak St., Santa Monica, Ca. 90405), *The Incomplete Terry Carr* (\$1 from Arnie Katz, 59 Livingston St. Apt. 6B, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201) and *The Really Incomplete Bob Tucker* (\$1.50 from Jackie Franke, Box 51-A, RR 2, Beacher, IL 60401).

Almost all of the material in *Fanhistorica* is worth reading, particularly Jack Speer's article(s) on numbered fandoms, Bob Silverberg's 1952 "update" of the theory (which unfortunately leads one of the editors, Gary Farber, into making the same mistake again), and the reprint of Harry Warner Jr.'s "All Our Yesterdays" column which offers an overview of the late Francis T. Laney's *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!*, itself a fanhistorical document.

But by far the best piece in the

issue is not a reprint at all; it's an original article of reminiscences by Lee Hoffman, "The Bluffer's Guide to Publishing a Fanzine." While Lee has written some fine science fiction and received the Golden Spur Award from the WWA for her novel *The Valdez Horses*, she is best known in fandom as having been the editor of *Quandry*, which is regarded by many—this reviewer among them—as one of the finest fanzines ever published. Her reminiscences about *Quandry*-publishing days are easy-handed, humorous and a joy to read.

THERE ARE few fanzines being published today which can be compared to *Quandry*. I would even go so far as to say that they can be counted on the fingers of one thumb.

For that reason, you should avail yourself of Terry Hughes' *Mota*; while the level of writing in it is not uniformly brilliant, the level of writing in it is, uniformly, brilliant—which is just to say that some things are more brilliant than others.

Mota resembles *Quandry* in a number of ways, including (but not limited to) its tone (unpretentious good-natured fun), its quality (high-level wit) and its subject matter (fans and their general wackiness). The truly astonishing thing about *Mota* has been the way the editor has somehow managed to accomplish every Trufan's dream by getting material out of a whole raft of fandom's most accomplished, respected and legendary writers—some of whom have not written for fanzines in eight or 10 or 15 years. Charles Burbee, Gary Deindorfer, James White, Bob Tucker, Bob Shaw and Lee Hoffman, among others, have all at one time or another thrown off the shackles of gafia (which stands for Getting Away From It All and is used to describe

the state of being no longer active in fandom) to make an appearance in *Mota's* pages. And while all of these pieces have run the gamut from merely great to downright fabulous, I'd like to opine right here that James White's "The Exorcists of IF" (which appeared in the 13th issue) was the finest among them by virtue of being—again, in this reviewer's opinion—the finest piece of fanzine writing in several years.

After all this build-up, you might be a little disappointed to find out that the issue at hand, #17, does not have material by any of the abovementioned greats, or even by anyone who is recognized primarily for their writing. The two feature articles in the issue are by Grant Canfield and Dan Steffan, who are recognized as two of *Mota's*—and fandom's—finest cartoonists.

The only way you'll *stay* disappointed, however, is if you fail to read them, as both Dan (with an illustrated essay on words) and Grant (with an illustrated essay on his experiences as a professional gag cartoonist) prove to be as hilarious with the typer as they are with the pen.

SO MUCH for things fannish, past and present. If you're just getting into fandom, you'll certainly want to know what's going on in the microcosm, present and future—where and when the conventions are being held, what other people are doing, stf news of interest, things like that.

The best place to do so is in *Karass*, which specializes in things like that. *Karass* is a fannish newszine.

But this cannot be a totally unqualified endorsement. *Karass* is the best fannish newszine of which I am aware—and yet it conveys the impression, from time to time, that the

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editor considers it with something less than enthusiasm.

The fact is, the editor, Linda Bushyager, edits *Granfalloon*, and it's easy enough to understand why she conserves her enthusiasm for that publication. The fact is, editing a fannish newszine can be a chore—although not entirely a thankless one.

Karass seems to be published as a service, and a service it is—a needed one.

I USED TO wonder how Jack Benny could get howls of laughter from an audience with a simple sigh. I could understand a chuckle, but a howl? The second time I saw him do it, I was reminded of the time before—and my laugh was a little louder because not only was I reacting to the context in which the sigh was dropped this time, but I was remembering the last time as well. The third time he did it—well, I began to understand how Jack Benny could get howls of laughter with his simple sigh.

There's a lot in fannish humor that is this way—esoteric, referring back to other things that are "common knowledge".

Only, of course, if you're a new fan, that knowledge isn't "common" to you.

Don't get uptight about it—it'll come to you with a little time. If you're afraid that it'll all be too esoteric—or that you'll get bored if it turns out to be too esoteric for you—then maybe you'd rather take the middle ground and get a genzine.

"Genzine" has come to have two meanings, both of them translating to "general fanzine"—the difference being whether the "general" refers to its type of circulation (an apazine is distributed through an amateur press association or apa, a genzine is "gen-

erally" available via subscription, trade, etc.) or the type of material it prints (a balance between fannish and serious).

Outworlds is a genzine in both senses of the word, and one of the best currently being published. For the new reader, it might prove to be the best bet if a choice of only one is to be made between *Mota*, *Outworlds* and *Algol*. It presents some of the best from both worlds.

Editor Bill Bowers has received a lot of compliments for his choice of art and layouts; while this issue isn't particularly startling in this respect, it is nonetheless an impressive visual effort—and the written contents generally live up to the presentation.

Robert A. W. Lowndes has some fine reminiscences in "Understandings: The Differences That Knowing Him Made" about the late James Blish. It's a piece that also fits in all the categories. Given that it's largely (but not solely) about what happened to them both as fans, it is fanhistorical and fannish; given that Blish was a seminal influence on sf as a critic and writer, it'll satisfy the appetites of those who most enjoy the serious and constructive aspects of fandom. And whatever rose you choose to call it by, it still smells as sweet.

IF YOU CRAVE that serious and constructive stuff, and your interests run primarily to discussions and analyses of sf, then *Algol* is probably your meat—and maybe your potatoes and gravy, too.

Algol disdains the title "fanzine"—although editor Andrew Porter has yet to pull it from contention for the best fanzine Hugo this year—and is accordingly subtitled, "The Magazine About Science Fiction" (emphasis mine).

This is not, as is so often the case

among the sercon element, sheer pretension. *Algol* is a magazine, professionally printed and graphically beautiful. Because of its size, shiny paper, professional ads and fine art, it easily outshines any professional sf magazine published in the United States today—thereby automatically putting any fanzine which cares to feel that way to shame. (Few fanzines care to feel that way, but that's the way it goes.)

Richard Lupoff's column, "Lupoff's Book Week," which was initially a column Lupoff did for an apazine of his own, has become an *Algol* mainstay—and for good reason. I think Dick is a fine critic—but, even if you don't, I think you'll find that he writes so entertainingly that you'll find you've at least enjoyed reading what he has to say, even if you don't agree with him.

Thomas Monteleone's "Fire and Ice: On Roger Zelazny's Short Fiction" is insightful and thought-provoking without being heavy-handed, but is almost overshadowed by Mike Hinge's breathtakingly beautiful two-page spread for it. Fred Pohl also has a very fine piece in this issue, "Basement and Empire," from his book *The Early Pohl*, and it's fannish in exactly the same way that Lowndes piece in *Outworlds* is.

SO THERE you are—your introduction to the world of fanzines. Buy 'em, read 'em, see if you feel like participating.

Any questions? I'll try to answer—but keep in mind, plez, that I'm an old fan and tired.

Fanzines for review should be sent to: Rich Brown, 2916 Linden Lane, Falls Church, Va. 22042.

What did I do with my xeno?

—RICH BROWN

AMAZING

ment at least.) The publication of *Heinlein in Dimension* was a public acknowledgement of Panshin's debt. (Although Heinlein has always responded negatively to Panshin's several critical works dealing with him, I suspect this can be traced back to the publication of Panshin's first piece on Heinlein, published in a fanzine under the title "Heinlein by his Jockstrap." The title—which offended Heinlein—is a clever play on Heinlein's well-known time-travel tour-de-force, but was not Panshin's. The editor of the fanzine had used it without Panshin's knowledge or approval. Alas, it set the tone for relations between the two, a tone which seems now unlikely to ever change. . .)

In Alexei Panshin's *Farewell To Yesterday's Tomorrow* (Berkley Putnam, 1975), in which his best short stories are arranged chronologically, one can watch Panshin's stylistic evolution away from the Heinlein mold. "What's Your Excuse?" the story which opens the book (and one of the first stories I bought for *FANZASTIC* when I became its editor), is very Heinleinesque in narrative style and development. "When the Vertical World Becomes Horizontal," the final story in the volume, is at far remove, both stylistically and thematically, from Heinlein. The book traces Panshin's own evolution away from his roots and the development of his own voice as an author. Even the preoccupations have changed.

Heinlein's fiction is often didactic, instructive. It usually deals with the protagonist overcoming adolescence—whether, as in the earlier books, a literal adolescence, or, later, emotional adolescence—and "growing up". "What's Your Excuse?" is quite literally about just that—growing up. Although Panshin's viewpoint (what "growing up" means, how it can be accomplished) is not Heinlein's, his concern at that point paralleled Heinlein's, and his use of narrative style echoes Heinlein's: charac-

terization is developed through action and dialogue.

By "When the Vertical World Becomes Horizontal," Panshin's preoccupations have changed and so, to a considerable extent, has his actual prose style. The latter story deals with growth, too—but as a response to a profound change in the world which implies a total rejection of Heinlein's matter-of-fact world-view. In the story, linearity has broken down. Reality has changed. Acceptance of the new fluidity—a Zen-like ability to "go with the flow"—marks the growth of the protagonist. The story is told whimsically, non-realistically. The story is very much a piece with the revolution (psychedelic and otherwise) ushered in with the end of the sixties.

Yet Panshin remains preoccupied with Heinlein, and has published several critical pieces in the last five years which put *Heinlein in Dimension* completely in the shade. One of these—the best—appears in a forthcoming Advent book, *SF in Dimension*, a collection of Panshin's essays and critical works.

Another of "The Sons of Heinlein" is Joe Haldeman. His *The Forever War*, which won the Nebula Award and (as I write this) is a nominee for the Hugo, is remarkably Heinleinesque—and perhaps the most effective of the several "replies" to Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*. (Earlier "replies" came from Blish and Dickson.) His new *Mindbridge* (St. Martin's, 1976) is also strongly evocative of Heinlein.

Like Panshin, Haldeman has his own point of view—which is not Heinlein's. But, even more so than Panshin, Haldeman uses Heinlein's tools, his devices, to build a story which—ideology aside—reads the way vintage Heinlein reads: almost impossible to put down.

Get this, the opening line of the book, a one-line paragraph:
"Denver pissed him off."

A natural hook, it tells you at once that the story takes place in a time and place not unrecognizably distant from our own, and establishes a viewpoint and an attitude—all in four words. One of Heinlein's strong suits is economy (less obvious in the bloated works of recent times, but let us forgive Heinlein the last fifteen years and remember best the previous twenty. . .); another is the way he takes the reader immediately inside his viewpoint character. (And the city of Denver is also a Heinlein favorite. . . .)

Mindbridge is, for me, an almost-great book. It fails, when it fails, for two reasons. One, it is short. At 184 pages the book feels thin. Although the contents page occupies in fact two pages and has 53 numbered entries, many of these are fragments—documents, excerpts from diaries, interviews or articles—and there are only fifteen chapters labelled as such. The book is dedicated to Haldeman's teachers at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and also to John Brunner and "Dos Passos, *pro forma*," the implication being that the style in which the book is assembled owes much to Brunner (*Srand on Zanzibar*) and thus, by extension, Dos Passos. But Brunner's book was far thicker and told a less coherent story, building it up in many layers. *Mindbridge* has a simple and rather straightforward plot; the added layers of documents, etc., exist more for didactic purposes than to add texture. That is, when an idea surfaces in the story—such as the "slingshot effect" of the matter-transmission principal exploited by the story (which is that anything you transmit elsewhere will return automatically in a certain amount of time, and anything you bring back with you will return to where it came from in an equal length of time—a nifty idea and a new one to me), we get a section titled "The Slingshot Effect," which is an "Excerpt from an interview with Dr. Jaime Barnett, Research Director, Agency for Extrater-

restrial Development, Colorado Springs, at the dedication of the new 120-cm. LMT crystal, 28 October 2044." A slice of expository information, in other words. The device is not Heinleinian—but the actual interview is, being the sort of explanatory dialogue Heinlein has often indulged in. On the other hand, while Haldeman has dressed up his explanations as entertainingly as he can, they *do* stop the story to explain what's going on, and without them the book would be much shorter. Thus, the actual room for plot and character development is less than one might expect, adding to the effective shortness of the book.

In this shortcoming lies for me the second, and real failure of the book: character development. Haldeman introduces in Jacques LeFavre a character with the potential to be interesting. He *tells* us—mostly in the non-chapter portions of the book—some interesting things *about* LeFavre. Jacques has trouble controlling his temper, for example. ("Denver pissed him off.") He was a bright child whose peers were afraid of him. As a child he dissected animals without anesthesia. He has a high "mindbridge" potential. He ends up as the bridging link—telepathically—between humans and a superior alien race. He is lucky and is in the right place at the right time almost too often for coincidence. (But that last is the author's contrivance; it is not a given aspect of his character.) He is somewhat hung up, sexually.

But in the course of the book, LeFavre *shows* us little of this. He walks through a series of action-oriented sequences which rarely call upon aspects of his character and seem never to develop his character in any way. He learns only *facts*. He does not grow up. He just grows older.

In the course of the book he is teamed with a woman named Carol with whom he develops a sexual relationship. The most effective scene be-

tween them is one in which they are linked, telepathically, while enjoying their first sexual encounter. It does not go that well for Jacque, although it does for Carol. Both admit it would have helped had they had sex first before trying the telepathic linkup. Why they didn't is never adequately explained and is a little hard to accept. Their relationship after this point is more a between-the-lines matter, implied but rarely dwelt upon. Yet, by the end of the book we learn that Carol is and has been the great love of Jacque's life.

My feeling is that Haldeman has been working in what I can only call Heinlein-shorthand. The deep, lasting love between a man and a woman which Heinlein portrays in his better novels is here encapsulated, alluded to, but not really shown. We are expected to accept it without more than passing reference to it, a given, because we are—presumably—already too familiar with it. Compared with the love affair shown in *The Forever War* (which it closely resembles in all but detail) the affair between Jacque and Carol is perfunctory—a set of clichés.

What is left, then, is the story itself. Even here the pacing seems off. It takes more than half the book to introduce the real problem—the first encounter with the aliens—and after a few skirmishes rather reminiscent of *The Forever War* the problem is solved and the book is over. Yet, Joe is very much a master of the tools he uses. He knows how to work in details which give us both a sense of familiarity and of social, cultural and technological change. Familiar words or terms used in new, somewhat different ways. Crisp dialogue. A feel—closely shared with Heinlein—for the essence of storytelling.

And new ideas. The matter-transmission idea is a gem (not an intentional pun) and its ramifications are lovingly worked out. The confrontation between human and alien is convincing. The book is almost-great. My

feeling is that with about 50% more material—including a lot more real character development—*Mindbridge* would have been a masterpiece. As it is, it may still win some awards and it has already been sold to a paperback publisher for a major-league price rarely obtained in the sf field.

There are other Sons of Heinlein, of course. Gregory Benford is one—he has the science completely under control, and his *Jupiter Project* (serialized here in 1972) published last year in hardcover, owes a major debt to Heinlein's juveniles. (The published book makes no mention of the novel's prior appearance here, nor of the fact that Don Davis' dust jacket painting first appeared on the cover of this magazine as well, but Benford tells me this was the publisher's error—the credits were in his manuscript.)

And F. M. Busby's "Search" in this issue also owes its debt to Heinlein, as will be obvious when you read it.

Clearly Heinlein—even if his best works were produced more than fifteen years ago—has given us an ongoing legacy, and one which will continue to enrich the field for some time to come.

FEATURES: Two features which have been missing from recent issues are back: *The Clubhouse* and *The Future In Books*. The former is back with us on a regular basis; the latter is back as a one-shot which may reappear on an irregular basis in future issues as well.

Susan Wood's last *Clubhouse* for us appeared in our 50th Anniversary issue. Unfortunately, a nearly identical piece appeared almost simultaneously in *Algol*. Susan Wood wrote to us, withdrawing the piece, after it had been set in type and the issue on its way to press—far too late for us to pull it then. At the same time Andrew Porter, editor-publisher of *Algol*, received another copy of the piece and rushed it into his Spring issue. (One item he did not rush into

that issue was my own column for *Algol*, a column which had been a fixture there for nearly a decade. Instead he cancelled the column and returned that installment to me. I shall not be contributing to future *Algols*—at Porter's request.) Both versions of Susan's piece were published almost simultaneously.

Susan Wood's withdrawal from *The Clubhouse* left us without an installment of that column last issue, but Rich Brown—author of the recently-published "How You See It, How You Don't"—has stepped forward to take over the column and I feel confident it is now in good hands.

Rich Brown became a science fiction fan in the mid-fifties and I first met him in 1958 at the World Science Fiction Convention held that year in Los Angeles. After a stint in the Air Force, Rich moved to New York City in the early 1960's, where we became close friends. When he married the lovely Colleen he asked me to be his Best Man; subsequently they moved to an apartment in Brooklyn within easy walking distance of my own. A year and a half after I moved back to Virginia, the Browns also moved to Falls Church, Rich covering the Treasury Department for Reuters. Leaving Reuters, Rich was an editor for the *Air Force Times*. He is now a full-time writer and, I think, an excit-

ing new voice in science fiction.

In taking over *The Clubhouse* Rich brings to focus twenty years experience in science fiction fandom during which time he has published a number of fan magazines himself. As a professional science fiction writer he brings to the column the memory of another professional writer who handled the column for the entirety of its first incarnation in this magazine, the late Roger Phillips Graham, who as Rog Phillips conducted *The Clubhouse* from 1947 to 1953.

When I suspended *The Future in Books* in 1975, I did so because I felt that book reviews were becoming increasingly beside-the-point in this magazine—especially when they were often a year old or older. I have not changed my mind since then, and the return of *The Future in Books* does not mean the return of book reviews.

Rather I have revived the column as a forum for authors to use in talking about their *own* books—or work. This issue Barry Malzberg talks about what went into his *Revelations*, a book which will be reissued in 1977, and in the process talks about his career and his approach to writing. Future editions of *The Future in Books* will appear when other authors wish to make use of the space to discuss their works.

—TED WHITE

Future in books (cont. from page 117)

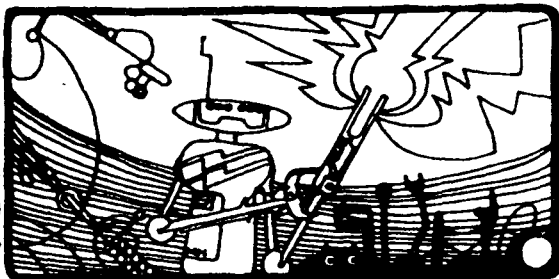
in about half an hour, pulling the novel along, getting my narrator off the pot and building in a new level of insight almost effortlessly. Pages 58–62 I owe to Robert Silverberg as well as much else, then. I take yet another opportunity to say that I consider him (no longer within easy phone reach, alas) the best living writer in the language.

IT IS APRIL of another year now and although I think that it must be the same bird gasping in the tree outside

it is a new squirrel gnawing away in the gutters and leaders overhead. Same office, same desk, although another typewriter and by far and in the most crucial sense another person sitting here, no longer content (if he ever was) to be only an engine of creation. Here, down here in the dream quarter, while the night falls down around us, choking like a collar, and absolutely nothing to be done because the light of revelation oh my dear and darkness is gone.

—BARRY N. MALZBERG

...OR SO YOU SAY



Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to Or So You Say, Box 409, Falls Church, Va. 22046.

Dear Mr. White,

I am glad to see that you have changed your mind about leaving *AMAZING/FANTASTIC*. You lend to these magazines the only stability they have, and I doubt that they would survive without you. It seems that the entire science fiction industry has of late been through one crisis after another. The field has wittled down until only the strong survive and even they are faltering.

I can remember during the sixties, when I was growing up, there were several top-notch magazines in print. At one time I had subscriptions to *AMAZING*, *FANTASTIC*, *GALAXY*, *Worlds of If*, *Worlds of Tomorrow*, *Analog*, and *F&SF*. There were others I suppose, but these were the best. Now only five of these magazines are in print, and not only that, out of a possible 84 issues a year now there are only 38 issues to chose from.

I hope your staying with *AMAZING/FANTASTIC* helps to stop this decline. I would like to see the industry go through a re-birth, but hopes are dimmer as time passes. Hang in there and keep the stories coming.

R. H. BLACKBURN
1321 E. 279 St.
Euclid, Ohio 44132

Thanks for your vote of confidence. I think it very likely you'll be seeing further changes in the field in the coming year—quite possibly involving this magazine. —TW

Dear Ted White,

I have just read your magazine (September) for the first time and found it very entertaining. I especially enjoyed George R.R. Martin's "Nobody Leaves New Pittsburg". It was a terrifically original and moving idea—the deadmen—and the image of all of them flopped all over each other in the giant warehouse is one I will remember for a long time. The ending was a little disappointing, though. It wasn't up to the rest.

I also liked Jack Dann's "The Dream Lions" even though I hadn't seen the first part. However, it contained what I consider to be one of the most tedious expedients in science fiction: somebody suddenly finds the perfect description for what they want to say in a metaphor from 20th Century Earth culture. Drusilla Newlon Campbell did this too, in her story "Dream of Trumpeters". It has always seemed odd to me that so many science fiction writers seems to assume that many aspects of our current cultural heritage (Euripides, Beauty and the Beast, the extinction of trumpeter swans) which are not even universally known to earth today will survive to be revered among aliens all over the universe. That seems a narrow-minded sort of con-

ceit. I guess using metaphors from our common past is a kind of short-cut or easy way out for the writer, but I think it suddenly strips away all the reality of the story and you are left seeing, for the first time, the puppeteer's clumsy hand. If the writer feels that the metaphor is absolutely necessary to him, at least he could remove from it its culture-bound connotations ("As Goth on Xrgon once said. . .") but not *Euripedes* for God's sake—he may not even make it very far into the 21st Century, let alone the future.

Finally, I would like to say that I found your editorial and letters column fascinating. I have been reading and enjoying science fiction since I was a child but I've never attended a convention or read any of the periodicals before so I feel a bit out of it. All your correspondents sound like far-flung members of the same family—there is a definite sense of a cohesive group with its own traditions, memories and villains. (I am very curious to know who is this apparently deranged Charles Platt and what he could have said that would cause you to sue him.) One other little mystery is the significance of "fan-zines" which I assume to be fan magazines. Fans of what? Science fiction? Science fiction personalities? Do they have pinups of Harlan Ellison? I can't imagine.

Well, I did find two out of five stories to be definitely worthwhile and that's a pretty good percentage for any collection. Maybe I'll even end up being a late-blooming fan, whatever that entails. At any rate, I think I'll buy the next issue.

ELENA PIROV
255 West 108th St.
New York, NY 10025

Charles Platt is a British fan and sometime writer/editor who presently resides in New York City and harbors strong resentments against yours truly—apparently because he believes himself to be better qualified to edit

this magazine and considers it to be my fault that he does not hold that position. His unpublished attack on me was libelous and, had it been published, would have prompted legal action on my part. As for "fan-zines," you're correct in assuming that the word stands for fan magazines—but in no way do these publications resemble commercially published the fan magazines devoted to movie stars, etc. Fan-zines are amateur publications put out by stf fans for stf fans, often mimeographed and with circulations rarely exceeding the low hundreds. See The Clubhouse this issue for more details and reviews of selected fan-zines —TW

Dear Ted,

I'm not really in to writing letters but. . .here I am. I just finished the September AMAZING and I'm moved to comment on a letter by another reader who seemed to think he had the answer to all your problems and was going to tell you what they were and how he would solve them. I subscribe to several magazines and it seems that if the readers aren't complaining about what was left out or in, they're telling the Editor "How to improve your magazine in only 7,000 easy steps." Frankly I'm getting a little bored. I don't agree with everything you say and I don't even like everything you say, but I don't write in and tell you about it every month (make that quarter). So I get an extra gold star by my name. . .whoopee. That's not the point. The point is *you* are the man in the hot seat and hopefully know how things must go. For 132 pages you get a lot of differing viewpoints in, and some pretty good stories besides. So here I go and play Billy bad-ass. . .until you've played the game you shouldn't be talking—you should be listening. Yeah I think you could do things differently, maybe one of these days you will, but I wish people would leave the editing to the editor and try to see what he

and the writers are trying to say. Just because I don't like something doesn't make my taste law. Isn't this what SF is all about? SF expands more rapidly than any other medium in the subjects it deals with and *how* it presents them. That is but one small reason (for me) why it is so exciting and interesting. The day AMAZING or any other magazine starts listening to readers who want their bias mandated or ego massaged, that day I stop reading. I don't care to read a magazine by self (or otherwise) appointed committee. Now, as I sink back into the great unwashed, all I have to say is. . . Who in the Hell is Charles Platt? (And why is he being such an asshole?)

MIKE HAGERTY
Ithaca N.Y.

Dear Sir:

It seems apparent that the SF publishing industry is possessed by business ethics which look peculiar to say the least. I refer to the practice of publishing a novel by the author's title in the magazine presentation, then substituting another title for paperback release. Frankly, is this intended to boost sales by tricking the public into unwittingly buying a book they have already read?

M. EPSTEIN
110 E. 36th St.
New York, N.Y., 10016
Not necessarily. In fact, I believe the presumption on the part of most book publishers is that their audience does not overlap the stf magazine audience by very much. The reasons for title changes are several. First, you can't assume that the magazine title is always the author's. It usually is—here. But other magazines have had a tradition of editorial title changes. Sometimes this is because the author's title seems clumsy or inappropriate to the editor; sometimes because the author's title comes too close to the title of another story in the same issue (or re-

cently published in that magazine). Then too, authors sometimes pick titles which, if you encounter them in a science-fictional context (a stf magazine, say) are acceptable but might be less so on the cover of a book. For example, many years ago Dave Van Arnam and I wrote a novel which we called When In Rome. We knew it was not a good title for a stf book, and then—Pyramid-editor Don Benson suggested Sideslip for the paperback edition, a title of which we fully approved. Had we been able to serialize the novel in a stf magazine, we'd have called it by its original title. There was no intention to deceive the reader, however. —TW

Dear Ted,

This letter is in response to Jon Nelson's letter.

First of all, as you said, I don't think Mr. Nelson has any knowledge whatsoever in Fandom, fanzines, or otherwise. I'm sure Ted can tell you that at least a reasonable proportion of 'fans' make up his subscriptions. I know that Ted used to be a 'fan' in his earlier days *sigh*, and I'm sure he can tell you the joys of Fandom in a hundred different stories (such as meeting that great editor, Terry Carr). I'm of the belief that you, Mr. Nelson, are a hermit; at least as stf goes. Are you ashamed of your hobby? Maybe not, but I know some people who don't like to get 'involved' in Fandom, and consequently put down fanzines.

As far as *The Clubhouse* goes, if you don't like it, why not skip it and go on to other things? Nobody forces you to read it. I don't read Jerry Pournelle's science in *Galaxy*. Frankly, I'm easily bored with such intricate details, but still, I don't down-grade the magazine. I'm also of the belief that you would be better off in the thirties, when stf was just getting on its feet, and cardboard characters had wars. Action doesn't make a story better.

Overlap between fan and author is good! Writers *are not* gods. (Sorry, Ted.) Getting to know an author, knowing *why* he wrote a character the way he did, helps you to understand his writing.

The only foreign stories that should be printed in their original language in England. I really don't see how your idea could help AMAZING. In fact, most people would simply skip the stories and go on to something they could read. AMAZING isn't a textbook to help foreign-language students.

The main point of this letter, and I'm sorry that you feel the way about fans you do, is to tell you that fandom isn't a degeneration; it's more like a blooming. We fans are getting to know ourselves and our field better. For us trufans that sincerely believe in FIAWOL (Fandom is a way of life), you have come along and tried to tear down something that was either for you, or none of your business. We *never* said you had to like Fandom. We never said you had to like anything more than reading *Analog*, but don't come at us with bared teeth. Because we don't care what you think about Fandom. If you don't like the *few* things published in AMAZING having to do with Fandom, then don't

read 'em.

Bova's book is sensational. Really. But I think that his instructions have to do with *Analog*. They're instructions to break into the *Analog* field. Those instructions he gives only fits *Analog's* editorial policies. No one else's.

Again, I'm sorry you think so little of we 'fannish' people, but I guess that can't be helped. All I ask of you is this: If you don't love, leave it. And I don't mean stf. I mean Fandom. Again, I'm sorry you haven't found the love and the warmth experienced by so many of us 'Fans'.

RANDY FULLER

603 E. Vine St.

Fulton, Mo. 65251

There is no dividing line between being a fan of stf and writing or editing it; few of those who produce stf would do so if they didn't love it. Thus, I still consider myself a fan. I first "met" Terry Carr in the pages of a fanzine when I was thirteen and he was fourteen; subsequently we collaborated on the production of a number of fanzines and, later, several short stories and a novel. Of course in those days I didn't know he was going to become a "great editor" and compete with me for the annual Best Editor Hugo award. . . —TW

Everything is Going to be All Right (cont. from page 101)

zled my eyes.

A stalky man in a blue suit was on the porch. His thick black hair curled around his face and fell down to his shoulder like a mane.

"I'm Howard Cohen from Hoover's," he said in a tenor voice. "Sorry about the mistake, but we'll take back Model 10-A and send 12-A as soon as possible. hope you weren't inconvenienced by having it here overnight."

"I didn't mind having a maid overnight," I said staring at his bulbous nose. "As a matter of fact, I find this

model satisfactory. Why don't you adjust my bill and we'll call everything square."

Howard Cohen nodded, a look of surprise fleeting politely from his face. "Certainly, Mr. Wills. I'll be glad to take care of that for you."

I nodded and shut the door. It was a beautiful day, and I laughed to myself as I started up the stairs. I only paused for a moment to pick a piece of lint that lay on the carpet. And I could tell everything was going to be all right.

—LINDA ISAACS

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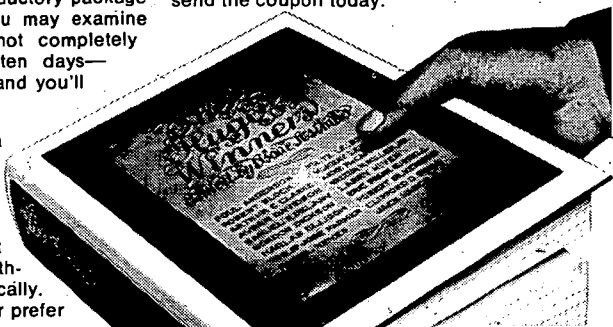
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